This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

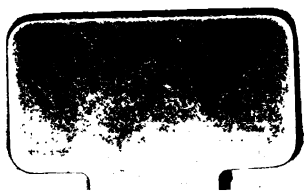
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

600093959+



60(

THE

Mysteries of the Kingdom;

A SERIES OF SKETCHES

EXPOSITORY

OF

OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR'S PARABLES.

BY THE

REV. JOSEPH BAYLEE, D.D.,

PRINCIPAL OF ST. AIDAN'S COLLEGE, AND INCUMBENT OF HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, BIRKENHEAD.

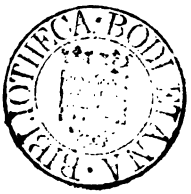
LONDON:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LON

LIVERPOOL: EDWARD HOWELL CHURC

1852

101. d. 74.


BIBLIOTHECA · BODLEIANA

CONTENTS.

PAGE.

Introductory Remarks on Parabolic Teaching 3

PARABLES.

I. The Sower 19
II. The Wheat and the Tares 37
III. Grain of Mustard Seed 53
IV. The Leaven 79
V. The Hidden Treasure 97
VI. Pearl of Great Price 113
VII. Gospel Net 127
VIII. Householder 145
IX. Lost Sheep 165
X. Two Debtors 181
XI. Two Debtors, (Second Part) 195
XII. Unmerciful Servant 213
XIII. Labourer in the Vineyard 231
XIV. The Two Sons 245
XV. Householder and Husbandmen 259
XVI. Wedding Garment 279
XVII. Fig Tree 295
XVIII Fig Tree, (Second Part) 307
XIX Ten Virgins 329
XX. Ten Virgins, (Second Part) 347
XXI. The Talents 367
XXII. The Judgment 385

ERRATA.

Page	6	line	10	for	Isaias	read	Esaias.
,,	11	,,	28	,,	though	,,	that.
,,	12	,,	4	,,	darkwise	,,	darkly wise
,,	50	,,	26	after	partakers	,,	of the blessedness and glory
,,	50	,,	31	for	to-day	,,	body.
,,	55	,,	30	,,	upon cross	,,	upon the cross.
,,	62	,,	32	,,	spirit is love	,,	the spirit is love.
,,	90	,,	2	,,	heart	,,	hurt.
,,	148	,,	4	,,	man	,,	him.
,,	183	,,	17	,,	repent	,,	repeat.
,,	185	,,	2	,,	well	,,	evil.
,,	186	,,	13	,,	them	,,	it.
,,	191	,,	9	,,	shades	,,	Hades·
,,	200	,,	17	,,	then	,,	there.
,,	202	,,	15	,,	secret	,,	second
,,	204	,,	24	,,	confined	,,	combined.
,,	208	,,	8	,,	doeth	,,	doth.
,,	209	,,	5	from	bottom, for it	,,	him.
,,	213	,,	10	for	interval	,,	rational.
,,		,,	3	from	bottom, for hours	,,	hearts.
,,	219	,,	1	for	in connection with that,	read	morning, not that.
,,	219	,,	2	,,	but as this	read	but this.
,,	219	,,	4	,,	permanently	,,	prominently.
,,	220	,,	13	,,	ye	,,	yea.
,,	220	,,	15	,,	of	,,	if.
,,	226	,,	9	from	bottom, for having	,,	have.
,,	226	,,	2	,,	,, an	,,	and.
,,	232	,,	13	,,	,, trusts	,,	turns.
,,	240	,,	15	for	work	,,	wants.
,,	243	,,	15	,,	hell	,,	hill.

THE following Sketches are not presented as elaborate expositions of the parables. Their publication has originated in the following way. I was urged by a valued friend to write out for him an exposition of one of the parables, which appeared to him to remove great difficulties in its interpretation. Not having time to do so, the result of several conversations on the subject was that I arranged to preach a series of sermons on the parables. Having consulted with some other members of my congregation, he arranged with a publisher to have the sermons taken down in short-hand and published, provided I would consent to the arrangement. I could have no other objection than an unwillingness to submit unfinished compositions to public criticism. The reader will remember that the following papers profess to be no more than sketches. They are popular addresses to an intelligent congregation, not compositions emanating from learned leisure.

As sermons, they are, in the true sense of the word, extempore. The style, therefore, of these sketches is simply the natural expression of passing thoughts, with no effort to attain to the language of the religious essay.

In fulness of statement, they do not profess to be more than the expressions of sentiment and feeling which spontaneously arise from a devout and earnest, but necessarily rapid, consideration of divine truth and teaching. It is very different, however, with regard to the views and principles presented to the reader. These are the result of years of patient, prayerful thought.

As a Christian teacher, I have always felt that a pastor's whole life should be the continual study of God's truth; and when this is the case, the delivery of a profitable exposition of particular portions of it will not demand laborious composition.

Every man, however, has his proper gift of God.

With regard to the reporters, I feel it only justice to them to say, that they have performed their task with singular accuracy. Here and there phrases are employed which are not verbally correct, and there are occasional omissions. These, however, bear so small a proportion to the whole, that I can have no objection to these sketches going forth as a sufficiently accurate report of my exact words. I have now only to ask the reader to pray, that a publication by no means contemplated by me may be owned and blessed by the Great Head of the Church, to the edification of souls in the setting forth of divine truth.

JOSEPH BAYLEE.

BIRKENHEAD.

PART I.

ON PARABOLIC TEACHING.

MAT. xiii. 34, 35.—"*All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables, and without a parable spake he not unto them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'I will open my mouth in parables: I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.'*"

The Lord seeth not as man seeth: the Lord doeth not as man doeth: the Lord teacheth not as man teacheth. When the blessed Jesus was in this world, how very different he was from the long expected Messiah for whom the Jews had been looking. They thought that they had gathered out of the Scriptures what Messiah was to be, and when Jesus came he was so different from what they had expected, out of the very word of God that taught respecting him, that they did not know him, they would not have him. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." When this same blessed Jesus stood amongst men as a teacher, how very different was he as a teacher from what people would have expected him to be—sometimes so very clear and simple, that the common people heard him gladly; at other times, indeed mingled with those very times, so very mysterious and dark, that to this present hour we feel that we are only getting a glimpse of the full mean-

ing of what he spoke. But he did not do this without a purpose: we read here, "He spoke to the multitude in parables." Instead of appearing to be a loving and kind teacher, there seems often a harshness in our Saviour's teaching: he says in this chapter, in the 13th, 14th, and 15th verses, explaining the reason of his parabolic teaching, "Therefore speak I to them in parables; because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias, which saith, 'By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive, for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them.'" We do, indeed, learn from this a deep lesson, that the Lord's teaching is very different from man's method of teaching.

The subject which our text brings before us to-day is one which very deeply concerns our own eternal interests. It is one that is well suited to make us search into the state of our own hearts, and to make us see whether we are those persons who, if our Lord Jesus Christ were here in person among us this morning, are in that state of mind that we could profit by his teaching, or only in that state of mind that would make us to hear in vain, and to no purpose. "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables, and without a parable spake he not unto them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'I will open my mouth in parables: I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.'" From these words let us consider:—

I. The nature of parabolic teaching;

II. The need that we have of that teaching;

III. The great blessing of it.

Let us pray that that blessed Spirit of grace, who alone can unfold the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, will be with all our hearts and all our understandings at this time, making us indeed to receive these mysteries into our hearts to the enlightening of our understanding.

1. Let us consider the nature of parabolic teaching.

It is simply comparison. Where there are two things that have any resemblance one to the other, and where we use one as the resemblance of the other, there we have teaching by parable. It is in the point of resemblance, and only in that one point, that the parable consists. A parable consists either of something giving us wisdom on earth, or giving us wisdom respecting spiritual things. The former sort of parable is not used by our blessed Saviour, or if it be, but very sparingly. It is once or twice used in the Old Testament scriptures; for instance, we have Jotham's parable, or rather fable, of the trees of the forest, which was not intended to teach them wisdom respecting heaven, but rather to instruct them concerning the choice of another king. The heathen fables all partook of this character. The well known fables of Æsop did not instruct them who sought therein for instruction in anything beyond worldly wisdom, and this is properly the distinction between a fable and a parable; in the manner of the instruction they are both the same, being a comparison of one thing with another. The parables of Scripture are intended, from visible or earthly things to teach the nature of spiritual and heavenly things. To interpret them rightly, therefore, we must consider what was the purpose that our Lord

had in giving them. We are not to take all the circumstances of the parable, and squeeze some doctrine out of each, but rather to consider what our Lord was about to teach; and in considering that, we shall get the principle of the interpretation, which will make the interpretation of the parables and their spiritual meaning simple and plain. The nature of parabolic instruction, therefore, is simply this: that it is intended to teach us about spiritual and heavenly things, by that which comes within the reach of our natural understanding, by the visible things around us, or by the social things around us, to lead our minds to think of invisible or heavenly and eternal things. If this be, then, the nature of parabolic teaching, let us consider, secondly, the necessity of it.

We do not see God, we only know him from his works, we do not see Heaven, we only know it by comparison or by the deep impression which God's Spirit can make upon the spirit of man. We cannot see principles, we can only perceive their operations in the world. Now the necessity of a parable is two-fold:

1. To assist us in seeing and knowing that by comparison which we could not otherwise have known.

2. To exercise our minds in the ability to discern not things but principles.

Let us take some thoughtless uninstructed, totally ignorant man into that great exhibition of the industry of all nations, which is now the wonder of our age, what would be the impression upon his mind? Simply that of wondering, he would go through the whole and obtain very little instruction, he would indeed see a large building, larger than he had ever seen before, a great collection of things, the nature and uses and purposes of

which he would but little understand, he would go out again impressed with ignorant wonder, but as to real instruction, he would derive very little from it. Take some other person well read in the history of the world, thoughtful, about all the conflicts of nations, acquainted with the history of the human family, the struggles and difficulties, the sins and the capacities of the human race. The same man instructed with regard to the purposes of God, in the past, the present, and the future. To him what would that same exhibition be? Every gaze that he took at it would bring some new thought to his mind If he were to see that vast building and think of the short time in which it had been got up, could he look at it without reflecting upon the power, the industry, the thrift, the skill and diligence that collected so many wonders together? Could he look at it to no purpose? How many lessons of worldly and moral instruction would he derive from that building, and if he were a well informed man as he went from one thing to another, how much instruction would he get from all the improvements that he would see around him? just in proportion to the knowledge he took into that place. But his thoughts would not end here, if he were one taught of God, if he were one whose mind dwelt much in heaven, and whose hopes looked to a heavenly future beyond this world's history, he would see other things and other sights in that visible collection of wonders before him. In that said "Palace of Peace" he would see nothing but the world's peace, and however he might rejoice at the temporary quiet of which this was at once the exhibition and the fruit he would remember what God's word says "For when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a

woman with child, and they shall not escape." He would look at all the skill and industry of man there exhibited, and he would remember that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof the world and they that dwell therein." His heart would sink within him at the thought that all that skill, all that industry, which was so beautiful was only expended on this present life, to gratify a passing taste, to soothe and stimulate a cultivated luxury, to polish all the circles of society. How little would he discover there of what a spiritual mind, of what a heavenly heart would most long to see, and he would leave that place impressed with this thought, "the men of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." It would bring to his thoughts —are men in earnest? are men thinking of eternity? to employ upon this present time all that skill which God has given them. Where are the missions to the heathen world, where are the corresponding efforts for the preaching of the Gospel, where is the laying all that we have at the foot of the cross of him, who laid all that he had in the manger of Bethlehem for our sakes? Would not thoughts such as these rise to him from such an exhibition as that? And here would be a great parable, the two men would be just a picture of the two classes of men to which our Saviour directed attention. A parable in this sense of the word is the taking something visible and making it the type of something that is spiritual, that is holy, that is heavenly. The need then that we have of parables to teach us is just the inability that we have to know what we have not seen, except by comparison. We could not know God, except by looking at the works of God, and seeing what he is by what he does: we could not know the joys of heaven without being able to compare them with the joys that we have on earth.

He who has made all things, things spiritual, as well as things temporal, things invisible, as well as things visible, as they have all come out of one great mighty mind, so they all bear the impress of that mind, and God has so constructed the whole world, that that which we see is but the type and teacher of that which we have not seen. This is the reason why our Saviour directs our attention to the lily of the field and makes it a parable to us, and asks "if God so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, will he neglect to clothe the bodies of those whom he has redeemed with his most precious blood? and tells us to look at things around us, and ask ourselves from what we see, what is the character of that which we do not see? If any of us were in some distant country, and saw sights there which we endeavoured to explain on our return to our friends, how could we possibly do it except by comparison with what they knew? And after we had described the whole, we should be obliged to tell them it is something better still, if you saw it you would understand it better than we can explain it to you by comparisons. They would feel that they had "seen but in part" and "known but in part," after they had listened to the fullest descriptions of the scenes, and the clearest comparisons of them. Now here we have the need of instruction by parable, and it was not to shut out man from knowledge, but to bring him into the chambers of true knowledge, though Christ taught by parables. "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in Parables, and without a parable spake he not unto them."

III. We have in the last place to consider the blessedness of teaching by parables. 1st. It is a great blessing to be tested as to our own character. Two classes of men heard our blessed Saviour speaking about eating

his flesh, and drinking his blood; some said "this is a hard saying, who can hear it," and they went away; others who understood just as little about what our Saviour said, felt drawn to him, they felt that he *was* darkwise. They saw that he was good, and his wisdom and goodness attracted their minds to him, they expressed their feelings in the language of one of them "Lord to who shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life." Now here is one great value of teaching by parables, it enables us to test ourselves, and see, are we really willing to be taught by Christ? This is a reason why the very Bible itself is a parable to us. How many men will take up the Bible and read it, and it seems too dark a book for them to understand, they will go to their learning that they may understand it, they take the ponderous folios that have been written by learned men and they read them, and they come back to the same book and it is a dark parable still. They read it, they search it, they exercise their own understanding, and they employ the understanding of good men around, and it is a dark parable still. The Lord is teaching a lesson by that very darkness, the Lord is giving them wisdom by that very ignorance. The Lord keeps them shut up that he may teach them where the true teacher is, where the true heavenly understanding is, and then opening their understanding, he gives them light in their inner man, he gives them holiness in their inward feelings, and then they come back to that same book, and it is no longer a parable to them. They are in a new world; all its declarations of the state of the human heart came home with power to them, for they feel it, all its descriptions of the blessedness of heaven are gladness to them, for they have the anticipated joy of heaven in the Spirit's power

in their own hearts. All the doctrines that are unfolded in that book they feel to be right, for when they read of what a Saviour they have, they know their need of a Saviour, when they read of the promises he left, they feel their own weakness, and when they read of the passing away of the present world they have found its emptiness. The Bible is no longer a parable, God has taught them, God has opened it to them.

Here then we have one great test, one great use of teaching by parables, it is a test of our own wisdom and just in proportion as we are ourselves taught of God, are we able to understand the word of God, and just in proportion as we are not taught of God is that word of God a parable to us. It is not in man, no not in the holiest man, for was there ever one so holy as Jesus? and was there ever one so able to teach as Jesus? and yet the outward words of Jesus did not and could not teach. He was, when he stood amongst them, one who spoke in parables, they understood him not, "therefore" he says here "speak I to them in parables because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand, and in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias which saith, by hearing, ye shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing, ye shall see and shall not perceive, but blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear."

2. And then comes the second feature of the blessedness of this teaching by parables, that when we find we do not understand, and know that learning cannot make us understand, and when we find that teachers cannot make us understand, we are then forced, by the feeling of our weakness, by the sense of our darkness, if we do desire to know, to come to him for teaching, who

has promised to give his "Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Here then is the second blessedness of teaching by parables, that it brings us closer to that heavenly teacher in whose light alone we can see light, and in whose teaching alone we can learn true wisdom.

But there is another blessing still, a blessing that is the superstructure founded upon these two great principles, and that is, it enables us to live in a spiritual world, it enables us to see things not merely as they are, but to learn from them what they are designed to teach us. Who that is habituated to his Bible, can walk out into the fields and see the shepherd with his sheep, and not think of the Good Shepherd? Who can have been reading of the fowls of the air, and not think of Him who tells us to learn lessons of trust and dependance from them. Who that is taught of God can see the sowing of seed, and not remember the need of a prepared heart to receive the "seed of the word." We are then in a spiritual temple, as soon as we have been really taught and prepared by parabolic teaching, we are every moment surrounded by invisible things and enabled to "endure as seeing Him who is invisible." Can we see the wound healing, and not think of him who came "to bind up the broken hearted," and to give the "oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness?" Can we see the sun rise on "the evil and on the good," and the "rain fall on the just and on the unjust," and not be taught of Him who is "good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works?" Can we see the evil of passion in the lower animals around us, and not see how grovelling and low is man thus led by his animal passions? And are we not thus taught to pray, to look up to God, and to exercise the nobler parts of our nature, not to

the crushing, but to the regulation of the inferior parts of that nature? Thus are we living in a spiritual temple, in every visible thing around us, in every direction around us, in every relationship around us. We cannot sit in our families without remembering the great family in heaven above. We cannot see the darkness of the grave without thinking of the place where the "Lord lay." We cannot lift up our eyes and behold the brightness of the natural heavens, without thinking of that greater and better brightness, where He is who is the glory of heaven and the fulness of its joy, in the light of whose countenance the spirits of just men are made perfect, and in the greatness of whose joy all their hearts are gladdened.

III. There is, lastly, a deeper teaching still by parables, and that is intimated to us by the latter clause of our text. "I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." Now this is declared to be the language of the prophet; we find it in the Psalms. A prophet is one who unfolds the mind of God to us; that psalm is not predicted of the future, but it is an unfolding of the mind of God. If you will turn to the 78th Psalm, you will see that it calls upon Israel to give ear: "Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable. I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us." The psalm goes on just simply to tell us the well-known history of Israel; it does not go into the future; it goes down to David and David's throne, and closes with saying. "So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands."

How, then, is it a parable? How is it a dark saying? How is it something that is kept secret from the foundation of the world? Just because it presents human life, not as a mere human history, but it brings the mind of God upon the actions of men. It brings the light of heaven upon the doings of man; it makes us to see, in the history of the past, the principles of the present; in the dealings of the past, the expectations of the future. It is in this point, then, that it is indeed a parable and a dark saying; something kept secret from the foundation of the world; a secret to those that are without, no secret to those that are within. By the study of human life in this respect, we learn that deep and difficult lesson—the parable of our own life. We do, indeed, as the apostle says, "See in part, and know in part, and understand in part." It is but a dark parable still in many things, yet he who is taught of God can look upon his life with other eyes than what he once did, and can learn from his life other things than once he thought. It was this that made St. Paul speak as he does of life in the 4th chapter of the Philippians: "Everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content." We can only understand the dealings of God with us when we look upon our life as a parable or comparison, when we are able to see that each event of life has come to us not from man but from God, not from satan but from Jesus, not by our own self-will but by God's will; coming to us not like the fable, with lessons of earthly wisdom, but coming to us like parables with heavenly wisdom. When we see in some mortifi-

cation of our vanity the voice of God telling us of the need of being like him, who was meek and lowly in heart; when we find in some act of our self-will, the voice of God telling us of the need of our will being brought into subjection to his will; when we see in the disappointed forms with which we looked upon the unknown future, disappointed in giving us gladness instead of sorrow, we see how little we are able to guide ourselves and to learn from that parable of life to trust him, who not only knows the future but is in the future. Here is the highest, to us at least, and the deepest teaching by parables, when we can come from the Bible, from the world around us, from every thing in our own individual case, when we are taught of God to ponder the path of our feet, and our eyes look right before us and see the divine teaching, and when we can feel the fulness of his blessing in unfolding to us the parable of life. We shall then see how imperfect it is to speak by comparison, it is but an imperfect knowledge of what shall be, like some one giving us a description of a beautiful landscape, which would fall short of what another person would give by taking us there and showing it to us. Our Saviour says, "the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in Parables, but I shall show you plainly of the Father."

Parabolic teaching has this last blessing, it brings before us even in its very imperfection, in its very darkness, that future time when we shall see him as he is, when that which is now invisible shall be revealed to our sight, when that which now we anticipate by faith shall be realised in heaven, when we seeing him "shall be like him as he is." Let us pray that our souls may be

guided, may be taught by God, that thus we may learn the parable of our own life and enter into the unseen realities of the eternal world, and that Christ may say to us, "blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear."

PART II.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

MATT. xiii., v. 18.—"*Hear ye therefore the parable of the Sower.*"

When we see great multitudes gathered together to hear the gospel of the kingdom of God, we are apt to have our hearts beat high with expectation, and our hopes rejoicing in the prospect of many souls being brought to consider the things which belong to their everlasting peace, and think we may now expect there is some great improvement going to take place in society. When the blessed Jesus saw great multitudes around him, he seemed to have very different feelings: very varied emotions moved his mind as he beheld the multitudes surrounding him. He saw the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; his mind could look under the surface of human minds and human hearts; his thoughts could pierce into the eternal world, and he never could shut out from his mind those solemn words that many would say to him in the last day—have we not eaten and drunk in thy presence, and hast thou not taught in our streets? and yet that he would have to say to them in that day, "depart from me, I never knew you." Now, it was under circumstances and feelings such as these, that we read of our Lord delivering the series of parables that are contained in this chapter. He had

been surrounded a little before by multitudes; his mother and his brethren came desiring to see him; he stretched forth his hand to his disciples, and said, "Whosoever shall do the will of my father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother." Jesus knew what it was to have the heart of a son towards a mother, and Jesus knew what was the heart of a mother towards a son, and therefore he knew the deep meaning of those words, "Whosoever shall do the will of my father," is unto me as dear as my mother.

It would appear as if he had gone into the house with his mother and his brethren, for we read in the beginning of this chapter, that "the same day went Jesus out the house and sat by the sea side." There were too many to allow him to stand amongst them to speak to them, and therefore he went into a ship, and sat, that he might the more conveniently, at a little distance, teach the multitudes the deep and awful truths that are contained in these parables—truths, awful in the dark side of them, because of the weight of woe that belongs to the rejection of divine truth—truths awful in the bright side of them, because of the unspeakable importance of that weight of glory that belongs to those who are fitted here by his truth—truths that were to be a mystery, and for ever a mystery to them that are without, and that were to be a revealed mystery to them that would enter in with Jesus into the chambers of true teaching.

The kingdom of heaven, we see plainly from this chapter, to be the church of Christ on earth, and each parable is intended to teach us something respecting the church of Christ upon earth. He begins with this important parable of the sower, and says, "Behold a sower went forth to sow, and when he sowed some seeds

fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up, some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth, and when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away; and some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them; but other fell into good ground and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold; who hath ears to hear let him hear." When the disciples were privately with Jesus, they were deeply anxious to know what the meaning of that parable could be; it seemed as if the words of the parable—even though those words fell from the lips of the blessed Jesus himself—as if the words were insufficient to teach—it must be Jesus who should unfold the meaning of the words to them, and therefore he says, "Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower,"

Brethren, let us remember that words now are just as insufficient to teach as words then were, and let us pray for that state of mind and heart which will enable us to receive those words, under the power of that heavenly teacher, the same blessed Jesus who is with us now, to unfold to the believing, waiting heart the same mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Let us, therefore, learn from this parable—

I. The need of a prepared mind to receive truth.

II. The natural capacities that are in all minds.

III. The hindrances to profitable hearing,

IV. The means of removing those hindrances.

V. The profitable recipients of this teaching.

We have first, then, the need of a prepared mind to receive truth.

The teaching of this parable is not that there is any

difference in the teacher, or any difference in the truth taught. As far as this parable is concerned, the whole difference is made to result in the ground, and therefore the whole purpose of the teaching of this parable, is to warn men of the need of a prepared state of mind to receive divine truth.

Oh! how miserably is this forgotten by the great mass of men—how ready we are to come to hear God's word—how flippant we are in speaking of God's truth—how swift in passing judgment respecting what is right and what is wrong—how slow to remember that it is only the spiritual mind that can receive spiritual things—the intellectual mind that can receive intellectual things—the human affections that can receive the things that belong to divine love—and that it is only those who are in a prepared state that can receive the good seed of the kingdom to real, permanent, and enduring profit. What the parable therefore teaches on the very surface of it is this, that we must have our minds in a prepared state to receive divine truth. If some eminent preacher come into a neighbourhood, a man upon whose words God had bestowed his blessing, around whose person seems the very atmosphere of heaven, and who, wherever he goes, draws souls to Christ, and hearts to the fountain of everlasting life, how many will be ready to run to hear him, as if there were a certainty of blessing in the mere goodness of the man, or the power of his preaching. But this parable teaches us to ponder the path of our feet—it teaches us the need of sinking down to the thoughts of our own minds, into the state of our own feelings, into the purity of our own desires, into the consecratedness of our own purpose, or we may hear in vain, we may hear to our bitter and

everlasting damnation. Here, brethren, is that which this parable then especially sets before us, if we would profitably hear God's word;—yes, even from the Son of God himself. We must have our minds and hearts prepared beforehand, or we cannot receive the word with profit.

II. Now, the second truth taught us here, is the natural capacities that are in all men to receive truth.

The four classes of hearers described in this parable had all ground that might have borne fruit. The "wayside" ground was not by nature unfit to receive divine truth. It was the ways of this world that had trodden down its surface, that had hardened it externally, and although there might have been a deep and fertile soil beneath, the trampling of the feet of this world's engagements, had so hardened the external surface as that it was unfit to receive—it could not admit within it—the seed that was scattered upon it. The stony ground had a surface of earth over it, which was so far fitted to receive divine truth. The thorny ground might have been by nature more especially fertile than the other ground: for the more fertile the ground, the more rank the weeds. It was not, therefore, any natural incapacity in the ground to receive the seed, it was the state of the ground; not unfit by nature, but unfit by circumstances; it was this that made it unfruitful, "nigh unto cursing." The good ground did not in nature differ from the thorny ground, or from the wayside ground, but simply it was in a state of better preparation, for its natural capacity was only the same. Now here is a truth which we should ever have before our minds: man's natural state was this—that he was made in the image of God; that being made in the image of God, he was the reflection of

the divine attributes; the qualities in man corresponded with the attributes of God; that the spiritual nature of man was fitted by nature to hold communion with the spiritual being of God; that the intellectual nature of man was fitted by nature to consider and contemplate—*intelligently contemplate*—the intelligent works of God; that the affectionate nature of man was naturally fitted to embrace the infinite love of God. That which man by nature had from God, when he came forth from his creative hand, man by nature has still, defiled, corrupted, trodden down, spoiled, but still these capacities are there,—a temple in ruins it may be, but it is the ruins of a temple fitted by nature for God to enter in and dwell there; affections perverted they may be, but still they are affections that never can be satisfied with all the creature objects upon which they are set—that never can be filled but by him for whom they were appointed—the incarnate God. Do we not find the scriptures constantly appealing to man as being still in the image of God? Upon what other principle is that law respecting murder based, in the ix. chap. of Genesis, where the reason for that law is assigned, as you will find in the 6th verse, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the *image* of God made he man." Man, therefore, has not lost the representative character of God, although he has become a sinner and a rebel, so that he who takes the life of man is taking the life of the representative of God, and therefore forfeits his own life, for in the image of God made he man. The law against polygamy, we find in the ii. chap. of the prophet Malachi, is in the same way based upon the fact, that man is still, in his moral and social nature, in the image of God, a corrupted image it may be, but still God's image. We

find in the latter clause of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th verse, "Yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant;" and did he not make one? "Yet had he the residue of the Spirit, and wherefore one? That might seek a goodly seed." Here the prophet gives the same argument as our blessed Saviour, who appealed as Malachi did to the Garden of Eden, to Adam and to Eve, to teach us that man, in his social capacity, is the same being now, naturally, that he was when unfallen in Eden's Garden; and that we may apply the laws that belonged to him in Eden to the condition of man now, as to what he is, in the reality of his nature. So, if we were not naturally in the image of God now, there would be no force in the analogy there drawn. The same view is taken by the apostle James, in the 3rd chap. of his Epistle, and the 9th verse, "Therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God." These passages, therefore, harmonize with that part of the teaching of this parable, that man has the natural capacity for receiving divine truth; but the parable also teaches us, that that natural capacity is rendered unfit to receive divine truth, and this brings us to the third subject.

III. The hindrance to profitable learning. The very leading idea of the parable is, that the heart naturally fitted by God, has become unnaturally corrupted by sin, and that, in that state, it cannot profitably hear divine truth. Let us consider, then, in the third place, the hindrances to profitable hearing, as brought before our thoughts by our blessed Saviour.

1. The first he gives, is the ground that is made a pathway by this world's travelling, the ground that is left open for every passer-by that chooses to tread it down,

and make it a path for his own purposes — not hedged in — not weeded — not broken — not prepared — no care of the husbandman bestowed upon it, but left there exposed and open, to be trodden down by the feet of every passer-by. Here we have the general character of the world, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart: this is he that received the seed by the wayside." Men can no more receive divine truth into them, who are not giving heed to divine truth, than can the trodden-down path of this world's highway open itself to receive the seed of the natural corn that may be scattered upon its surface. And is not this what we find in the larger proportion of men? Every worldly care may tread them down — every worldly thought may pass over their minds — every hardening influence may go by unremoved, until their minds get into that state, that the light of truth cannot penetrate — the power of truth cannot enter; they have ears, but they do not hear — they have eyes, but they do not see. The seed of divine truth is cast upon the surface of their minds; the enemy of souls is watching, and he comes and takes away that word that was thrown upon their minds; they are like the senseless ground, they have never received it, and they never can receive it; they are a highway for the world and its travellers; and thus they bring forth no fruit. Here, then, is the first hindrance, which our blessed Saviour brings before us, the dulness — the carelessness — the hardness of the state of mind, which is trampled down by every neglected circumstance, and every casual person that may exercise his worldly, deadening, hardening, influence on the wayside of their hearts.

...2. The second class of persons presents a very different reason for not producing fruit. There, it is not the world's footpath, but it is a superficial attention, the upper surface soft enough, all that is apparent prepared enough; but there was no depth, underneath was hard rock. The seed was cast upon the ground,—it entered in sufficiently; the depth of soil was sufficient not only to receive the seed, but to receive the warmth of the sun and the moisture of the rain that falls upon the evil and upon the good. There was, therefore, in the beginning, the same effect as in the good ground. But presently the moisture began to exercise its influence upon the seed; that warmth began to develop its powers; and the seed began, in the course of nature, to strike its roots downwards, and it finds a hardened soil underneath, which it cannot penetrate; and then the power of the sun makes the rootless seed to wither away; no fruit can be brought forth in that superficial soil; the greenness that was for a season seen there is dried up and withered; the early promise of fruit, all the earlier because of its shallowness, vanishes away into disappointment, and it brings forth no fruit. Oh! what an example to us of another state of the hearts of men. Man has his deep principles, that enter into the very depth of his being; and he has those sympathies that are but as it were upon the surface of his heart and mind. There is that state of mind in which we give deep, earnest heed — thoughts that follow us wherever we go — that enter with us into our lonely chamber — that go with us into the abodes of the world's business — that come with us to the house of God — that are our abiding thoughts. There are feelings that in the same way have a sort of omnipresence with us;

withal shall I be clothed," may allow his mind to be so perplexed with these things, that they may turn him away from the consideration of eternal things, and he will become unfruitful. Our eyes may be obstructed from the light of the sun by two copper coins placed before us, quite as much as they may be by two pieces of gold placed before us, and if the cares of poverty become an obstruction between us and the light of divine truth, it as effectually darkens the soul as can the deceitfulness of riches. Therefore Christ warns here the man who has the cares of poverty, let him beware lest these may hinder him from coming to hear, or hearing, from giving heed to the word of everlasting life. How many souls have remained unfit because they were ashamed to come up to the house of God with poor clothing, and they remained away, not even hearing the word. How many under the burden of the perplexities of poverty are allowing their thoughts to wander away even while they are in the house of God, to run after the cares of poverty, instead of feeling that though they may be for a season poor, yet they shall indeed be rich, if they open their hearts to the unsearchable riches of Christ.

But our blessed Saviour speaks not only of the cares of poverty, but of the deceitfulness of riches. Whatever hindrance to the soul poverty may be—and it is, if not prevented, a great hindrance—there is a far greater hindrance in the deceitfulness of riches. When a person is out of humour with his circumstances he is very apt to be out of humour with himself and everything around him; but when his circumstances are calculated to satisfy in a great measure the desires of his nature, then he is apt to get into that good humoured state of feeling that makes him look

with comparative brightness at least, upon every thing around him. In this respect the rich man can appear to be religious much more easily than can the poor man; if he be moderately careful, he is not exposed to the temptations that the poor is; he may not be always in danger of losing his situation if he keep to his conscience; he is less dependant on his fellow men, and is better able to satisfy his desires; he may acquire a respectable character for religion by giving, with such moderate liberality to the cause of God, as does not deprive him of one single comfort; he may, with his increased goods, merely say, "Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," and do no one open act of sin that will arouse his conscience; he may be able to fulfil, in the eyes of the world, the duties of life; he may be able to satisfy, in the low demands of the church, the demands of religion; he may go on thus with the deceitfulness of riches, not really giving heed to those words of Christ, "Except ye forsake all that ye have, ye cannot be my disciples." To him religion makes the word crucifixion a word without meaning; it makes the crown of thorns some past transaction, which, to him, is only matter of mere history; he knows nothing of the piercing of its prickles, he knows nothing of the burden of its sorrows—yet he can go on with this sort of religion; he is to himself apparently bringing forth fruit, yet, in reality, the deceitfulness of riches may be choking the seed. The needful mortification of the flesh, the needful subjugation of the heart, the needful prostration of the spirit before God, he may never have learned, he is in danger of never learning the depth of truth that there is in these words, "He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Oh! brethren, we should think of that word of Christ, "the deceitfulness of riches," and beware of setting our hearts upon them, which pierce the man of God through with many thorns. But there is another thing that our blessed Saviour presents to us as one of the hindrances of the same character, "The lust of other things." He does not say the lust of sinful things, but the lust of other things, because it is not so much by that which is sinful as by that which is not sinful, in itself, that Satan deceives souls, and the measure that we ought to have of the good that is in anything, is just in proportion as it brings us to Christ, as it realizes eternity to us, as it teaches us about heaven, as it is a ladder step by step raising us from earth to heaven. If it be the lust, the desire of *other* things—yes, if it be the love of a father or mother, or brother or sister, or husband or wife, or son or daughter, it will be that which is choking God's word within us, and making the soul unfruitful. These, then, are the three great hindrances that Christ warns us of, with respect to a heart that may be unprepared, not for want of natural capacity, but through neglect.

Now, what are the means of removing these? This brings us to the fourth subject.

IV. The means of removing these hindrances from us.

1. The first is easy enough; to prevent our hearts from being thrown open to every wayside traveller, and trodden down by utter carelessness, the foot of the world hardening where the seed of Christ ought to be sown.

2. The second would seem a more hopeless case; where there is a heart under the surface hard, with the upper surface soft; that is, where there are those who have the sympathy, but not the principle of religion

about them. The remedy for this is, to bring our hearts to him who has promised, in his great mercy and grace, "I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." Oh! that we may indeed bring our hearts to him with a willing readiness, to suffer whatever it may be that is to soften our hearts, whatever it may be that is to break up our hearts—"Is not my word like as a fire," saith the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces—as a fire to melt down the stoniest and hardest human heart." This is a remedy which we may indeed apply, in earnest prayer, in constant watchfulness, against that hardness of heart which belongs to us all, to be removed by the hammer of God's word, in applying his truth so as to break up all that is hardened, and the fire of God's love softening and melting down all that is hard within us. Here is that only remedy which can do it, and we must, in this respect, count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations, and pray that we may have grace to let "patience have its perfect work," that our hearts may be softened, that our stony hearts may be melted, and that we may be fit to become the good ground, to bring forth fruit with patience.

3. Can we not remove the other hindrances by bringing our poverty, with all its cares, to him who was "poor for our sakes," that if we are ready to faint with the load, we may hear his words, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," and bring our riches, with all their deceitfulness, to the foot of his cross, who showed us how he became poor that we might be really rich; and who has stamped, on every piece of gold given to us, God's image—Christ's image, and on the other side, that solemn word, Steward-

ship—responsibility, that we may feel the truth of the words, "The silver is mine and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts;" and to look upon all other things as dangerous things, if abused—as blessed things, if used, that we may be able to bring them to the foot of the cross, and there enjoy them in Christ and with Christ?

V. We have now to consider, in the last place, the profitable recipients of divine teaching. They are the good ground, the heart prepared by the Spirit of God—the heart disciplined by the chastening of God—the heart that is constant in its attention—the heart that is fervent in its love. There is no pathway of the world's passengers found in that heart;—there is no rock of natural hardness found there;—there are no weeds growing up neglected there; this is the honest and good heart; the seed of the word is sown there, and it brings forth fruit, some sixty-fold—some thirty-fold—and some a hundred-fold.

Brethren, there is, indeed, a deep teaching in this variety of fruitfulness. All are not equally fruitful, and yet all might be equally fruitful. St. Peter tells us how an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto us, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to your virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindess; and to brotherly kindess charity: for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Even of the good ground hearers some were only thirty-fold, compared with those who were an hundred-fold. And as the merchant-man in this world's merchandize is not willing to count thirty-fold for gain,

if he might gain three times that amount, so must he that has set his heart upon heaven be willing to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord; that he who has brought forth thirty fold, may, by the aid of divine grace, be fitted, the next year, to bring forth a hundred-fold, to the praise and glory of that grace. And in doing this we must be in such a state of mind, as will make us feel that our poverty may be turned into a blessing—our riches be turned into a blessing. Will he, who desires to bring forth a hundred-fold—will he close the hand that holds the purse that God has given to him, for the glory of God, and refuse to supply the need that God, in his providence, casts in his way? Will he who desires to be an hundred-fold producer of fruits—will he shrink from the care of that poverty that will make him have a deeper trust, and a warmer love in that Saviour, who, though poor, and not having where to lay his head, brought to this world the unsearchable riches of eternity? Will not he who desires to bring forth an hundred-fold, with a whole heart and mind, take all his associations in life and so weigh them in the balance of the sanctuary—and so brighten them with the light of heaven's truth, as that they will all be made stepping stones to bring him higher towards heaven, and nearer towards Christ? What will be the feeling of such a man in all the opportunities that are given to him? If we were all desirous of being the producers of fruit an hundred-fold, would it be that so small a portion of us would be found at the holy Communion every Sabbath morning? Would it be a few of us that would be found labouring for the wants of Christ's Church, whether in the neglected family—

the deserted streets—in the houses of sin and infamy? Would there not be those that would find time—who would be ingenious in finding time for the good of others, for the culture of their own hearts, and for the bringing forth the fruit of patience to the praise and glory of God.

Brethren, let us pray that we may profitably hear the parable of the Sower—

"He that that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART III.

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES.

MATT. xiii. v. 24, 25.—"*Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*"

The great expectation of the Jews in our blessed Saviour's time was Messiah's kingdom; they called it indifferently, "the kingdom of God," or "the kingdom of heaven;" each phrase was an abbreviation of that longer expression which we find in the second chapter of the Prophet Daniel, where Daniel is explaining the vision or dream that was given to Nebuchadnezzar by God. Daniel declares, in the 44th verse, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." They called it, therefore, "the kingdom of the God of heaven," or "the kingdom of heaven," or "the kingdom of God."

Matthew's gospel was the one specially written for the Jews, and it is striking that it is the only gospel that uses this phrase, "the kingdom of heaven." From the parallel passages of the other gospels, where we find

"the kingdom of God" used, we learn that the two phrases mean precisely the same thing—that very kingdom spoken of by the prophets—the very kingdom that was to have been set up by God upon earth.

The second condition of that kingdom (which is in this chapter described as a mountain—its first condition being a stone)—we find described in the 7th chapter of the Prophet Daniel and the 13th and 14th verses, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom, that which shall not be destroyed." In reading the gospels, we must bear in mind these two conditions of the same kingdom, or we shall often be perplexed. The location is on earth under both circumstances; the condition, in the one case, is of struggle and war—in the second, of victory, quiet, and glory. The time of the one is our present condition—the time of the other is when our blessed Saviour shall come in his glory. Now, this parable before us includes both these times. As far as concerns the time of the parable, it is our present history down to our Saviour's coming, and then the subsequent history onwards, when "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

The more we examine our blessed Saviour's parables, the more we shall find that each one is not intended to be a full description of that kingdom; for the word parable means a comparison—some one striking thought or principle connected with the kingdom of heaven.

On last Sunday we examined the parable of the Sower, what our Saviour intended to teach us respecting the state of the heart of each individual hearer of God's truth. In this parable our Saviour gives us two classes of persons contained within the kingdom of heaven—the one the children of the kingdom, the other the children of the wicked one; and, in passing, I may just observe how important it is to bear in mind Scripture's own explanation of its phrases. In this parable the children of the kingdom means only those who are renewed in heart and mind; and yet, the same phrase, the children of the kingdom, we find in the 8th chapter of St. Matthew, applied to those who have gained admission into that kingdom in membership, but had no preparation in heart for the same. In the 11th and 12th verses of the 8th chapter of St. Matthew, we read, "And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This is one important illustration to us of the two-fold application of words—their higher and holier application to things as they really are—their outward and more formal application to things as they appear to be.

But to return to the exposition of this parable. Our blessed Saviour is here setting before us especially this thought, that the kingdom of heaven contains two classes of persons—the one the children of God, the other the children of the enemy of God. The place where they are found, though designated the kingdom of heaven, is declared by our Saviour himself to be the world, (in the 38th verse, "the field is the world,") spread

far and wide through this earth, east and west, and north and south, all is God's kingdom—all is Christ's kingdom—"the field is the world."

Another important matter is to settle what is the seed spoken of here.—A man sowed good seed in his field. Now, our Saviour declares the seed to be men; the good seed are the children of the kingdom: and he declares the tares to be men—the tares are the children of the wicked one. Yet when we come to examine this explanation, we must remember that all men are by nature the children of Adam, and, therefore, it must be men in their character, rather than men in their individual persons, which brings us to the thought—how was it that they became the children of God? or how was it that they became thus the children of the wicked one? St. James explains to us how it was that they became the children of God—"Of His own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." It was men, therefore, with the seed of divine truth, not the mere letter only, but with the living power of divine truth, renewing their hearts—it was men with hearts renewed by the living word of God in their hearts and consciences that formed the good seed spoken of here. And in the same way it was men with the power of evil sown in their hearts, that evil power penetrating through their whole being and making them wicked beings—these were the children of the wicked one, the devil sowing the principle of evil in their hearts, and making them the children of the devil, as we find in the gospel by St. John, where our Saviour was speaking of those who were the children of the wicked one; he says, in the 8th chapter of St. John and the 44th verse, "Ye are of your father the

devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." Here, therefore, our Saviour marks those who are the children of the devil by those who have the same disposition in their hearts, the same purposes in their minds, and the same self seeking and worshipping that the devil has; they who have the lusts of the devil, or the desires of the devil—they are the children of the devil. It is, indeed, an awful truth that is thus presented to our minds—men, children of the same earthly father—men, living in the same world of God—men, redeemed by the same blood of Christ, and yet, one class the children of God, and the other class the children of the wicked one.

He who sowed the good seed is here declared to be Son of man. He may use instruments, and does use instruments in the sowing of his heavenly seed, but every good gift and every perfect gift is from above—it cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. The hand that reaches it to us, or the tongue that speaks it to us, may be the hand or the tongue of our fellow-man, but the hand that sends it down from heaven, and the tongue that speaks it from heaven, is the hand and the tongue of the Son of man in heaven. He that sowed the good seed is the Son of man. And, as we can see Jesus Christ, in glory, from heaven sending down the power of divine truth, though not visible to the natural eye of any man, so he that sowed the evil seed is the devil. The lips that speak bad principles, the hand that brings to us bad things, may appear to be the hand or the lips of our fellow-man; but there is another being sending that agent of evil—the devil—the wicked one, whose very name, devil, means the accuser, the one who can

first corrupt, and then accuse of corruption, the sons of men.

Let us picture to ourselves, brethren, the view here given us of the field, the great field of God's providence and grace—"The field is the world." Let us look at every kindred, tongue, people, and nation, not as they appear divided into their political parties, not as they appear in their various forms of religion, but as they appear to that eye which sees things in exact truth, and as they are unfolded, truthfully, by the lips of him who is "the truth." And how does the world appear? One great class of human beings, the children of God, another great class of human beings, the children of the wicked one.

Our Saviour presents this field to us under three aspects:

I. Its present condition.

II. Its transition state.

III. And lastly, its condition of glory.

We have its present condition—the seed of divine truth growing up in the hearts of converted men. First, the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear, teaching us how it is that the purifying principles of divine truth strengthen, take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards, in the hearts of God's children. We are not all at once to expect these fruits of the Spirit which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God; it is a gradual work that Christ describes here. A man does not appear all at once manifestly as a child of God; all men are by nature alike sunk in the depths of human corruption, and those who are the children of God, become by grace gradually transformed into the state of converted men; for a time they may be as diffi-

cult to discern from the tares, as one blade of wheat, in its youth and its greenness, would be difficult to discern from the small blade of the tare that is springing up. Gradually, as it grew, and gained strength, and formed an ear, there would be seen the fruit in it, and men could not mistake the character of the one for the character of the other. It was when the time of the fruit came, that the servants discovered that these were wheat, and that the others were tares.

Man was not intended of God to be a judge of his fellow-man; and there is a season in the history of every child of God, when he is scarcely discernible in his character from the child of the wicked one; but if he have the love of God in his soul, the renewing power of divine grace in his heart, the time will come when, in the eye of man, as clearly as in the eyes of angels, and of Christ, each one will be manifested as a child of God. They that are otherwise, says the Apostle, cannot be hid. It is the same way with the children of the wicked one.

Take the youthful heart, in its apparent innocence, the unhardened spirit, the yet docile mind—evil principles scarcely seen in it, yet the evil nature there, because man is by nature corrupt, and the devil-sown evil principles only barely planted; the little feeling of covetousness seems to be too small to be called by so rude and harsh a name; the various developments of evil that afterwards appear to be so bad, seem as yet to be small faults upon the surface of the character—it has not grown, or strengthened, or developed, or brought forth its evil fruits; but a time comes when the evil character is seen. There is, with every one, the crisis of his life, when he must declare himself to be on the Lord's side or on the devil's side; and it is seen in the season of

difficulty, in the time of trial, in the providentially appointed times of distinction between men, when we must say on whose side we are; the children of the wicked one begin to develope themselves by doing the work of their master, as the children of God manifest themselves by doing the work of their Heavenly Master. Christ represented his servants as saying, "Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, an enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them." Man will be very speedy, but very rude in his remedies for evil—it seems the shortest way to remove evil to cut it down at once. Just as some unskilful surgeon will think the best way will be to amputate the limb, but some better and more able one will be able to set it right, and cure it. The servants would say, let us pluck up these tares; but the master valued the wheat too much to do this; he knows that the neighbourhood of a tare cannot hinder the wheat from ripening; therefore, he says, "Do not pluck up the tares, lest ye root up also the wheat with them." The Eternal can afford to be patient; and God, who sees the end from the beginning, can look upon the growing evil, can see that its day of uprooting is coming, he can bear with it in much long-suffering until the time of the harvest come. He can say, "Let both grow together," because he knows that it will not be for ever—"Let both grow together until the harvest." Here, then, is the mixed condition of the kingdom of heaven clearly set before our thoughts. But not only its mixed condition, but the close intertwining that the children of God and

the children of the wicked one have. As in the natural figure, the wheat and the tare standing together, and growing together, will entwine their roots the one round the other, so that to uproot the one would be to uproot the other also. So is it in our social condition; men are so connected together, that if we pluck up the one, we pluck up the other also. Where shall we find an unmixed community? Is there not the heathen husband and the believing wife? is there not the believing husband and the heathen wife, presented before our minds in the epistle to the Corinthians? Does not our blessed Saviour tell us a man's foes shall be they of his own household? Can we find a family in which there is not a difficulty in their religious life? Can we find a congregation in which there are not the children of the wicked one deadening the influence and benumbing the power of the children of God in the same? Does not everything in life set before us the fact that men are so connected together that we cannot separate the evil from the good? Our Saviour here does not speak of the danger of mistaking the tare for the wheat—nor of the danger of mistaking the wheat for the tare; it is because of their roots being so entwined together, that the plucking up the one would be endangering the rooting up of the other. Hence, he represents the servants as knowing the difference between the wheat and the tare, and that both must grow together until the harvest.

Let us again view this figure, so far as regards the guardian care of God. It is the same earth into which they have struck their roots, it is the same sun from heaven that has been shining upon both, it has been the same rain from heaven that fertilized and moistened the ground which gives vigour to both, and yet the one, the

tare, only strikes its roots into the fertile ground to make itself the more strong, and the more perfectly unfruitful. What a picture here of the mercies of God, even towards sinful men, and of the depth and blackness of that corruption which out of the fertility of the soil in which God has placed it, and out of the bounties of grace which God has bestowed upon man, can bring poison, sin, and enmity. Who are the tares? They may be in this congregation this morning. Who are the wheat? They may at this moment be inspired by divine grace. Whose are the consciences that are at this moment hardening, instead of softening under the power of divine truth? There is this difference, while there is this analogy between wheat and tares, and men, that the tare cannot become wheat, but the wicked man may become a good man. The Lord deals with the wicked and says, "Make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel." Every comparison between natural and spiritual things must fail in some thing, because, as I have already stated in explaining the principles of parabolic instruction, it is not in all things they agree, the comparison is simply in the point of agreement. Brethren, if, therefore, there be one heart here this morning, if there be one conscience here this morning which must feel itself to have been hitherto a tare, and not wheat, there is no reason why it should continue so. God's grace is standing at the door of your heart. God's Son is knocking there. God's transforming power is able to do that which the natural soil and natural rain could not do, to transform the character of the evil man into the character of a good man, and to make it a true saying, "instead of the thorn, shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar, shall come up

the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Now, if this be the present condition of the kingdom of heaven, wheat and tares, evil principles corrupting men, and making them the children of the wicked one, good principles purifying men and making them the children of the kingdom,—the children of God,

II. We have the transition state of the same kingdom brought before us. "In the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." "The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore, as the tares are gathered and burnt in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." The expression, "the end of the world," the "harvest" leads us to a very solemn thought, that it is an appointed time, that it is a season hastening onward. Thus, each day in summer, in natural things, ripens the fruit of the earth, and prepares it for the harvest, and so each day's ripening brings the harvest nearer. There is the same principle in the kingdom of grace, each day preparing the ripening of the root of the good seed for blessing, the ripening of the evil seed for cursing. The development of the principle of good, and the development of the principle of evil going onward the harvest. When our blessed Saviour said, "pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest," he not only taught the great lesson of his compassion for souls, but a great warning

that there was an appointed time, a day of salvation—a day that was to close, a season that shall come to an end. The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. Thus Christ, when he comes again in his glory, and brings his holy angels with him, has pledged himself to gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, that he will take out of his kingdom the children of the wicked one and fill this world with the children of God. John the baptist declared of Christ, that "he will gather the wheat into his garner, but will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire?" The transition state of the kingdom then, is the exercise of that judgment which is no longer intended for conversion, but for the exercise of separation, the time when the day of grace shall be past for a little season, the day of judgment, of separation, shall have come, and the awful division shall be made of the sheep on the right hand, and of the goats on the left. I need not dwell upon this transition state now, because in other parables, our blessed Saviour brings it more in detail before us, but pass onwards to the subsequent state as described by our Savour in these words, "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father; who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

III. Its condition of glory.

You will observe that he makes here no difference in the location, the place is still the world, "the field is the world," but in another state, the offences taken out of it, the workers of iniquity taken out of it, and then the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. This is a very frequent description of the righteous in scripture, that they shine forth in great brightness when the wicked are removed,

There is less of miracle, and more of natural operation in the earthly part of the glory that is to be in the millenial dispensation, than those who read the scriptures at first sight, would be apt to think. Another great feature that is given to us of the shining forth of the righteous is the removal of the obstructions to that shining forth. Our mutual influence upon each other is a subject of awful consideration, how much do the prejudices even of good people prevent the development of divine grace. The Spirit of God deepens the love of God in the heart, but when the love of God living within the heart desires to develope itself in works of love in the world around, it seeks to do good, it puts forth the budding of its renewed fruits, but it only finds itself in a wintry atmosphere, chilled and nipped with the coldness of this world's atmosphere. Others who have not come to the same warmth of love, to the same energy of purpose, to the same holiness of walk, cannot understand the deeper feelings, the more fervent love, the more holy walk, the more spiritual views of those who are more deeply taught of God, and the children of God shrinking back into themselves with their fruit, because of offences—cannot walk in the holiness of spiritual life as they would, their own graces so kept down, their spiritual faculties so undeveloped, and the field appears but a contracted field, and the growth is but a limited growth, it cannot be developed. The atmosphere is unfavourable, and grace is something that comes down from heaven; it is at present as it were an exotic upon earth, and men lower in grace hinder the work and spoil the life of those who are higher in grace. But Christ declares that there shall be taken away scandal, all things that offend, as well as them that do

iniquity, he shall remove the stumbling block out of the way of his children. The work of grace shall then be able to develope itself fully in the heart, and the words of divine truth shall then be living powerful words, the righteous shall indeed be righteous, and they who profess to follow the example of our blessed Saviour, Jesus Christ shall indeed follow the example, and they who have seen him lay down his life first, shall learn how to lay down their lives for the brethren, and then the following of the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, shall not be mere words, but men shall be able to walk after the footsteps of our holy Saviour. Then the shining of divine grace on the character of men, reflecting freely the glory of the Saviour's grace as he shines upon them, shall not be obstructed by the hindrances from dark souls around, and shall not be hindered by the stumbling blocks that lie in the way of the children of God, and shall not be sullied or stained by spots or stains of sins that shall be upon them, then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. With regard to those who shall have returned with Jesus, we have reason to believe that it will be a physical as well as a moral brightness. It was seen when our Saviour stood on the mount of transfiguration, when his raiment did shine as the light, and his face became resplendent as the sun. Of those who are partakers of the first resurrection, it shall indeed be true that "those that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." But there is, brethren, a better shining than even the glory of the resurrection: to-day, a brighter light than even the shining which is above the glory of the sun, coming from

divine truth, there is the glory of divine grace, there is the spotlessness of divine holiness, manifested in the character—seen in the temper—acted out in the life—visible in the being of all those who are indeed to be in the kingdom of Christ, in that day of blessedness and glory, "when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

What, then, is the lesson that we are to take home to our own hearts and thoughts in considering this aspect of the kingdom of heaven? Are we not to ask ourselves what are we? are we wheat or tares? are we the children of the wicked one or are we the children of God? If we are the children of God, how is the growth of the work of God developing within us? Is our profession correspondent with our attainments? If we have indeed the renewed heart that is able to look up to heaven, and say, "Whom have we in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that we desire but thee?" Are we growing in grace? is the state of to-day an advance beyond the progress of yesterday? are the resolutions of to-day, a holy determination to be more holy to-morrow? are we determined to be indeed the children of God, growing in grace, increasing in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Brethren, "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." Let us remember that it is not men, but the Son of man, that can sow divine truth in the heart—that can multiply right thoughts in our consciences—that can give vivifying power to the letter of divine knowledge, that is sown by the lips of the outward and visible minister. Let us realize Him that is invisible; seeing him that is invisible, taking truth from his lips, and taking benefits from

the faces of resurrection men, there is the brightness of his hands, that we may become like him, and be fitted for our place of blessedness in that glorious kingdom—"When the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father"—"He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

PART IV.

ON THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD.

MATT. xiii., v. 31, 32.—"*Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.*"

In this parable we have another and very important feature of the kingdom of heaven presented to us. The parable of the sower directs our thoughts to the state of heart of him who is to receive the words in which divine truth is declared. There the seed is not divine grace, but the statement of divine truth; the sower soweth the word; and there the field is not the world, but the heart of man; as our blessed Saviour himself tells us, "The devil came and took away that which was sown in his heart." That parable, therefore, teaches us the need of having our hearts in a right state to receive the truth—"The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord." It teaches that the word spoken by our blessed Saviour himself could only become fruitful in a prepared heart. We have again the parable of the good seed sown in the field, where the field is the world, and where we have the good seed—

men impregnated with divine truth; and the tares—men impregnated with Satan's errors. But now we have another view given to us of the kingdom of heaven, one of unspeakable importance; it is again the heart of of man that is presented to us—but now it is no longer the seed of words merely, but it is the seed—the divine seed—that is planted in the converted heart—the seed that becomes victorious over every opposing power—the seed that is developing continually into the tree in which the birds of the air can come and lodge in the branches thereof. People have applied the idea of the seed of grace to baptism, as if, because we are brought under the power of divine grace, at least under the agency of divine grace in baptism—and indeed we are—as if that were the seed here spoken of which might fail, or might be cultivated by human power and human attention. But this is indeed a great mistake. We do, indeed, enter by baptism into a solemn covenant with God, and God enters, in baptism, into a solemn covenant with us, and we are thereby made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. From the hour of our baptism, the Holy Spirit is pledged, by the covenanted blood of the cross to deal with every baptized person as no longer one of the common fold of this world, but as a member of the church of Christ; from the hour of our baptism, the Holy Spirit is thus pledged by the blood of the cross to deal with every baptized person as one who is to be thenceforward under the agency of divine grace, and under the operation and dealings of the blessed Spirit of God. Yet, baptism was not intended to change the heart, to renew the soul, or to

in us that divine seed of which this parable

Baptism can only make us members of the

kingdom of heaven, in that sense in which our second lesson this morning teaches us; there may be children of God who shall be cast into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And here, brethren, is another view of divine grace given to us by the blessed Saviour. And he has given us a new comparison of the kingdom of heaven, to teach us to return and examine the state of our hearts—not in that ordinary grace of God which every baptized person alike experiences, but in that renewing power of the grace of God in which men are born not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever—"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

Our blessed Saviour introduces to our thoughts, upon another and very solemn occasion, this idea of the grain of mustard seed, because he knew he was approaching to the great act of faith which he had himself to perform—it was when he was coming to that hour when the power of darkness, and when the prince of this world was to come and see if he could find anything in him—it was when he was to call upon the apostles to follow him, not only to danger but to death—it was when he was to call upon his beloved followers to look at him nailed upon cross, to see him crucified and dead, to see him the object of the world's scorn, and the rejected one of the church of God—it was then that Christ, looking at the mountain of difficulty which was before

himself, and the mountain of difficulty which was before the little assembly of believing men that surrounded his person, he said to them, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall not only say to this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, but all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." There we have our blessed Saviour showing us one application, at least, of the grain of mustard seed; how it was that, through faith in the heart of men, they can remove mountains, they can make every hindrance to vanish, and can triumph over every obstacle; for "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." And now, if we have Christ thus explaining the mustard seed and its result—the mustard tree—to us, we have St. Peter showing us the nature of the seed. We find it in the 1st chapter of the 1st epistle of St. Peter, and the 23d verse, where he says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever, for all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever; and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." It was not the preaching of the word by the Spirit, it was the power of that word implanted in the new born heart, that new birth, the test of which is this, that "unto you that believe Christ is precious." Here, therefore, are the persons of whom our Saviour himself says that the kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field—the heart of the converted man—the recipient of the power of the

living God, that word bringing forth fruit to the praise and glory of God. Now, in the 3rd chapter of the 1st epistle of St. John, we have that incorruptible seed again brought before our thoughts, where the apostle says (in the 9th verse), "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God." There is here the birth and the holiness in that birth—"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;" and there is the seed here, that incorruptible seed of the word which abideth, it is the abiding seed—"His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God." That seed is the power of God's truth implanted in the renewed heart of man; it is thus the power of God's living word, not his spoken word, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life—it is the power of his word, as Jesus himself said to his disciples, "The words that I speak unto you they are Spirit and they are life." Now, it is to direct our thoughts to this character of the kingdom of heaven, that our Lord says "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field." It is, I say, the human heart in a converted state of which he speaks here, and, therefore, the kingdom of heaven here is not a location, as it was in the former parable—"The field is the world"—but it is the heart renewed by grace. If we speak of the kingdom of heaven as a locality, then the kingdom of heaven is the world, the great field of this world's cares; if we speak of the kingdom of heaven as a power of grace, then the kingdom of heaven is the power of the Spirit of God in the hearts of the children of men. It is with this view that our Saviour thus speaking, not of the locality but of the power, says, "The kingdom of

God cometh not with observation"—"The kingdom of God is within you."

St. Paul, taught by the same Spirit, says in his epistle to the Romans, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Now, if in this point of view, we come to consider a grain of mustard seed as the living word of God, sown by the Son of man in the converted heart. We need not speculate upon the mystical nature of that word; we can more profitably examine it in its power. The human mind cannot conceive of things in their essences; we must see them in their development before we can comprehend them; first causes are seen alone by God; second causes are the only things that can be seen by God's creatures. Now, in looking at the seed in this point of view, in its development, we have our Saviour teaching us, not to regard its smallness; the power of God does not consist in size, but in power. The infinity of God is as beautifully revealed to the understanding of man in the infinite smallness discovered to us by the microscope, as it is unfolded to the understanding of man in the infinite space partially discovered to us by the telescope. And the same principles of divine truth are as much seen, and as much acted upon, in the smallest and, apparently, most trivial action, as they are in the government of kingdoms and the regulation of worlds. The same principles of eternal justice that make God himself to govern the whole universe, are the same principles that enter down into the smallest events of our lives, and make us act honourably, and justly, and holily in the minutest details of ordinary life, quite as much as if we had to bring them to bear upon the greatest events. We should,

therefore, remember that power does not consist in magnitude, but in energy. The power of the kingdom of Grace in the converted heart of man may be as small, apparently, as the grain of mustard seed; but if it have that divine energy within it, it will develope itself into a great tree, and will be one in which the fowls of the air may come and lodge in the branches thereof.

The first thing to which our thoughts are directed, is the power of that living word that is hidden in the heart of man. All that is visible in our external life is the simple development of all that is hidden in our inner life. "Ye are dead," says the Apostle, "and your life is hid with Christ in God." The busy scenes of the world around us—the conflicts of men and nations—the struggles of parties—the toils of business—the contentions and the storms of life; all those cares and perplexities, and labours of life—all originate in that silent and secret recess of thought which is hidden from every human eye. And this our Lord brings to our thoughts, when he says, the power of the kingdom of heaven is hidden in the heart as the little grain of mustard seed is hidden by a man who sows that seed in his field; and yet it does not remain there; energy from God cannot be deprived of its power by anything in the creature. The energy of divine love, when implanted by the hand of God in the converted heart, will not remain dormant. Energy, coming from him, whose nature is active, is itself active; whose nature is powerful, it is itself energizing; and, therefore, it will develope itself, until it burst the bonds of every superincumbent weight—will spring out, and come forth in the bright daylight of heaven, to manifest itself in all the variety that the tree sets before us, springing from the

small hidden seed. But Christ tells us, that the power of faith is this: that if we had but faith as a grain of mustard seed, we could remove mountains. St. John affirms the same in declaring, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

And now, brethren, what is that faith, which thus may be small, but is divine in its energy—which may apparently be hidden, and yet enable the man who possesses it to meet the whole world with all its frowns, and fear not those frowns—and all its powers, and shrink not from its tyranny—and all its oppression, and not be deterred by its shackles—and all it attractions, and not be misled from the right path by any of its seductions? What is the power of that faith that does this? The soul believing by realizing a present God;—the soul able to realize its own living connection with a present God in Christ;—the soul able to cast the weight of its being, and the care of its well-being upon a present God—able to bring its whole being, with all its faculties, to the living power of a living God. It is this principle which brings us into a living feeling contact with God; this is the faith that can remove mountains—this is the victory that overcometh the world—this is that only holy principle which can manifest us to be God's children indeed. Who can fear, that has God for his shield? What can be a difficulty in his way, who has the promise of God to rely upon? What can be loss to him, who has learned to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord? If there be a tremendous power of darkness against such a soul, there is an infinite power of light heavenly holiness that shields that soul. If he is landed to go into a world of enemies, greater and

mightier than himself, despised by men, and apparently deserted by God, he endures, as seeing Him who is invisible, and he can go into that world, and remember that there is an unseen, and a mightier arm sustaining him — that there is a divine sword that is fighting his battles — that there is a shield between him and his enemies — that there is a sun to enlighten him, a joy, which the darkness of this world cannot take away; "for the Lord God is a sun and shield; he will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." It is the energy and power, therefore, of the living word sown in the heart of man, developing the power of this faith, which our Saviour compares to a grain of mustard seed.

Brethren, let me ask you, have you felt the power of that faith? Are you daily and hourly realizing the presence of God? Are you connecting the living God with your souls? Are you taking God in Christ to you as that being in whose presence you live — upon whose arm you lean — whose promises are your treasure-house — whose power is your strength — whose truth is your shield and buckler — and whose glory is the hope of all your hearts? If you have always thus before you, God in Christ, a sin-pardoning, soul-cleansing, spirit-quickening God, then to you belongs this blessed description of the kingdom of heaven: "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field."

But Christ now speaks, not only of the power of the grain of mustard seed, but of the manifestation of its power: "When it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air lodge in the branches thereof." For a time that seed, with all its

divine energy, is hidden within the heart; but after a time it develops itself visibly—it puts forth its energy—it rises above the surface—it increases by degrees—it becomes a tree—it puts out its branches; and soon the birds of the air can find a resting-place in its branches, and food in its fruit; for in natural things the mustard tree—the eastern mustard tree—is loaded with birds, who seek their resting-place on its branches, and who delight in feeding upon its seeds; so that our Saviour could probably point to the mustard trees around him; and we can easily imagine that the multitudes could actually see before them a mustard tree covered with the birds of the air, and those birds feeding upon its little seeds. A very beautiful figure it was of the growth of divine grace; and that when we are no longer babes in Christ—when we are no longer walking without Christ—when we have come into that higher form in the school of Christ, to that better development of the grace of Christ—when we have past out of the state of spiritual infancy into that state of developed grace of manhood—when we have the fruits ripened—when we have the branches spread forth, we are ourselves persons under whom others can gather those fruits of the Spirit, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. In this figure, then, we have not only the internal energy of this power, but the external development of that energy; and we have the usefulness of that developed energy:—the fowls of the air lodge in its branches, and they partake of its fruits. The apostle Paul, in the 5th chap. of the epistle to the Galatians, gives us these blessed fruits of the divine power in the heart of man, "the fruit of Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" What love is it

that is thus the fruit of the spirit? It is human love, consecrated by the Divine Spirit. We must never forget, that grace is nature delivered from its sin, and made perfect. That same affection, which by nature we give to a beloved object—by grace we give to beloved objects —set first upon Him whose name is Love; it reflects the brightness and the purity of the glorious love of God; and when we can set it in that reflected brightness and purity on objects around us, the birds of the air can come and lodge in the branches of that tree, and find, indeed, that the fruit of the Spirit is love: for he that loves God, loves his brother also.

And what is that joy that is this fruit of the Spirit? The gladness which the heart of man by nature has, when its desires are fulfilled. Just as it is with love, so it is with joy; the gladness that we have in divine things is, in the nature of things, the same gladness that we have by nature in anything that satisfies our love; and, when joined to the divine nature, it is sanctified by the divine enlightening: it is thus made glorious, and made heavenly; it is given back again to be exercised in the power of enjoyment from things around, and in the giving of enjoyment to things around, there is indeed that joy; the joy of the Lord is in the strength of that gladness, and that is the power in which their joy gives happiness to others. Where there is the growing power of divine grace; the full development of that divine energy in the life of any true child of God; those who come into the atmosphere of his presence—those who may lean upon the arm of his graces—those who come seeking to him for the fruit of that Spirit dwelling within him, will find, indeed, that he is the giver of joy, as he had been the recipient of joy from him whose love

is gladness, and whose glory is unspotted holiness, and in whose presence there is fulness of joy. In the same way the peace, that is the fruit of that Spirit, is the satisfaction which the human heart has by nature, when its desires are satisfied. We find, in our natural condition, that there are seasons of natural calm, when we are undisturbed by passion — when we are unexcited by desire — and when we are satisfied in our appetites. Alas! how soon does such a calm change into a storm — such a satisfaction vanish, like the morning cloud and the early dew! In those who seek their peace in the world, and not in Him who is our peace, the natural capacity for receiving it is the very same as that by which we receive peace from God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Hebrew word for "peace" means "correspondence:" that which corresponds with our nature is that which can give us peace; and when we look at the blood of the Cross, we can indeed find that which gives us peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Does not the guilty need pardon? We find it in that precious cross. Does not the needy need supply? He finds the supply of all his wants there. Does not our nature need to be met in all its parts? He who has made man in his image, is himself the counterpart of the image. He who looks at the blood of the Cross — at him who hung upon that Cross, is able to say, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not, with him, also freely give us all things?" How can he otherwise than have peace, who is looking at Christ as God's gift, and at God as the giver of Christ; he has only to draw near, in full assurance of faith, and rest upon him with the full repose of his whole being, and find that, indeed, there is peace within to him that believeth And

he who is thus at peace with himself, will have peace with others around him; he will not be too much agitated and distracted by this world's troubles. The child of this world, who feels the pelting of its pitiless storms, and the unsatisfactoriness of all its promises of joy and bliss, can he come under the shadow of one that is at peace with God, and not find his own spirit calmed. Thus he who has that holy calm will be a shelter to those around him—thus the birds of the air can lodge in his branches, and find, in coming and taking shelter with him, that he will take them to the same Saviour, in whom he has found peace, and make them to know the same peace which he himself has experienced; as the Apostle declares, as the minister of Christ, in the 2nd chap. of the 1st epistle to the Corinthians, "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

And, again, there are other fruits of the Spirit brought before our thoughts long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; all these spring from that little mustard seed of the divine energy in the heart of man. How can he be otherwise than long-suffering to those around him who feels how long the Lord has borne with himself! If he be in the post of a teacher, and find but intractable scholars, does he not remember how long he himself has been an untractable scholar in Christ's own school? If he be suffering under disappointed hopes—a rejected affection, how will it bring before his thoughts the Saviour, who has suffered so many disappointments (if we may call them disappointments) in him, and rejected affection? So he has been taught long-suffering who has experienced the long-suffering of

God in bearing with himself—who has experienced the gentle dealing of the divine long-suffering to his own soul; how he has borne with his waywardness—how he has melted his stubbornnesss—how he has subdued him by the power of his love, and wearied out his opposition by the unwearying exercise of his own long suffering and gentleness, and goodness. He cannot but imbibe, and, therefore, cannot, but diffuse around him, the same blessed principles. He cannot but be long-suffering, gentle, and bountiful, (as the word "goodness" here means,) to all around. The birds of the air come and lodge under the branches; the people that are brought by the providence of God within the sphere of his influence, will feel that the power, and strength, and energy dwelling within—the long-suffering, the gentleness, and goodness of the child of God is developed there; they experience the blessedness of its fruits, and lodge under the power of his goodness. And we have, in the same way, the faith that is spoken of here. Faith presented to us in the Scripture is, if I may so say, a primary and a secondary grace. There is the primary faith to be the foundation of this blessed grace—a faith that is the fruit of that faith. This is that faith of which the Apostle speaks, in the 1st chap. of the epistle to the Romans, where he speaks of the power of the Gospel of Christ, and says, in the 17th verse, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith." He that has faith in God, receives a new power, which produces other fruits of faith; and he finds the power of his faith strengthen and its subjects increase from time to time. The object of his faith is one and the me at all times—God in Christ. The subjects of his

faith are those blessed promises of God, which bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. Therefore, the faith spoken of here is that secondary faith, in which the exercise of our confidence produces new exercises of faith in the unchangeable love of God. And in this faith, the fruit of the spirit, the birds of the air come and lodge under its branches; and he who is thus strengthened in his confidence towards God, will be increasing in the confidence which he will inspire in others around him; and he who is himself continually relying upon the unchangeable promises of God, will become proportionably unchangeable in his own promises.

"Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope," is the pleading of that faith in the believer's life towards the object on whom he relies, and the same pleading will not go up in vain from others to him who is in the habit of thus pleading with God. He who says, with earnestness, "Thou hast caused me to hope in thy word" will not be the one to disappoint those who put their hopes in his word. Thus we have the fruit of faith, not only in its energy in the heart, but in its development in the life, and itself becoming the source of blessings of a similar kind to those who come to shelter under its human development.

Meekness and temperance are those other fruits of the Spirit that are here presented to us as the power of that grain of mustard seed implanted in the heart of man. He, who was the meekest man upon earth, was meek because he endured as seeing him who was invisible. Could any one of us be overcome by the excess of passion if we had Christ visibly present to our eyes? We could not—we dare not. And if we are able to realize him, who is invisible, continually to our own

mental sight, we cannot but be meek and temperate in all things; as the Apostle again says to us in the 4th chap. and the 5th verse of the epistle to the Philippians, "Let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand,"—the Lord is here with you—the Lord is abiding with you—the Lord is present with you; let your moderation, your meekness, your gentleness be known unto all men; for the Lord is at hand; he is at present with you.

Brethren, here then is what Christ brings before our thoughts in this parable of the grain of mustard seed. It is, indeed, the least among seeds; for a little while there seems to be no divine power in it; but it soon developes itself, and manifests itself to be the power of God unto salvation. It is seen, and known, and read of all men

Now, let us ask ourselves, in conclusion, is this the faith that we have? Is this the love that we have received? Is this the energy that we have been putting forth? Are the fruits of the Spirit seen in us? Can men draw near to us, and lodge under the power of these manifested fruits of the Spirit? Can they see in us that faith that can overcome every difficulty—that faith that produces these blessed fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance? These are the product of human power, but the fruits of the Spirit. May they find their places—their abiding dwelling place, in every heart, and produce the energy of their fruits in all our minds, to the praise and glory of God.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART V.

THE LEAVEN.

MATT. xiii. v. 33.—"*Another parable spake he unto them: The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*"

We may view every thing in a twofold aspect, its absolute condition, and its relative condition. We must consider all that concerns religion in this same twofold aspect. We never take a right view of ourselves until we view ourselves in this twofold manner: we are to see that we are ourselves right, absolutely right, with respect to ourselves; and then we are to see that we are right, relatively right, with respect to each other. The parable before us is strikingly suited to bring before our thoughts these two views of ourselves, and of every thing around us. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened." The natural figure made use of by our Lord is this, that when that which is intended to be made bread is worked up into a dough, it requires leaven to ferment it and to make it leavened bread. Now that leaven which the woman is here represented to have taken and put into it was nothing more than what had been dough before, and was left to come into this fermented state which is called leaven. Into this, therefore, it had changed its condition from what it had been in its

freshness, and when it was put into the mass of dough by the woman, and hid in three measures of meal, it produced the same change in the whole mass into which it had been put. There is a difficulty in the interpretation of this parable, whether our blessed Saviour was speaking of the influence of good or of the influence of evil. The parable is suited to teach us, that it is impossible for any one to become changed in himself without producing an influence upon others. If the soul be indeed renewed in the Saviour's image, if it receive the Saviour's brightness on that renewed image, if it be filled with the Saviour's love in the warm affection of the natural heart, there is no doubt but that the soul will reflect the Saviour's brightness as well as his image upon others around, and will diffuse the warmth of the Saviour's love into the souls that come within the atmosphere of its influence. But while this is indeed true, it is very questionable whether it is the truth, that our Saviour meant to teach us in this parable, for we do not find the term leaven used any where in the scriptures for the influence of good. In every part of the Bible it is used for the influence of evil, and the natural figure of leaven is not an imperfect state of the dough, in its freshness, but a corrupted state, so that it is naturally fitted to indicate to us the fall to evil, rather than a change for good. And when we remember, that the Lord himself in other places uses leaven as the image of the "hypocrisy" of the Pharisees, and that the Apostle declares that a "little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," and that in the paschal service there was no leavened bread permitted to be used in all their coasts, during the whole of the paschal solemnity, we are safer in taking this parable our Saviour's admonition to us respecting the lea-

ven of evil principles and the work of unbelieving man in the kingdom of heaven, until the whole mass becomes one fermented corrupt mass, fit only to be thrown into the "great wine press of the wrath of God." It is in this point of view, therefore, that I purpose to compare this parable with those other passages of Scripture which indicate to us the fall to evil, and the progress of evil in the Church of Christ until all that he was here speaking of should become one mass of evil only fit to be "cast out and trodden under foot of men."

Brethren, it is indeed an awful subject, a subject that enters into the state and condition of each one of us, one that calls upon us to examine the permitted evil that may be in our own hearts, to remember that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Let us pray that He alone who can help us to purge out the old leaven, that we may become an unleavened mass of sincerity and truth, may be with us this morning with his own cleansing and renewing power, to make us indeed sanctified for the Master's use, and prepared for every good work.

I shall consider the work of the leaven here in a three fold aspect:—

I. Predictive.

II. Moral.

III. In the lessons by which we are taught to escape the evil here set before us.

Now if we look at the leaven in its predicted teaching, it intimates to us that there is a time when the kingdom of heaven shall be one unmingled mass of evil. In the preceding parable we have the kingdom of heaven exhibited to us under the powerful manifestation of divine grace, and we have other places of Scripture teach-

other destroying angel, "Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great wine press of the wrath of God." Here then we have in these predictions taken from other portions of Scripture the illustrations of what we may draw from our Saviour's words, that the leaven put into the three measures of meal worked its fearful work of evil in it until the whole was leavened, and became only "fit for the wine press of the wrath of God."

II. We have now in the second place to consider the moral teaching. Here we might view the teaching absolutely and relatively. That is how evil may work in each individual heart until it corrupts the whole; or how evil may work in the community of professing Christians until the whole be corrupted. But if we see it in the one on a large scale, we can apply it to the individual case on its smaller scale. It will be sufficient therefore to look at the scripture teaching respecting the manner in which the leaven of sin and corruption was foreseen by God, and foretold by the Spirit of God as about to work in the kingdom of heaven until those who are baptized in the name of Christ, and dedicated to their Saviour's service should become infused by the malice of Satan, and dedicated to the service of sin. In the 5th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, we find the apostle bringing before us this thought of the work of evil leaven in the condition of a Christian community. He says in the 6th and 7th verses, "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be a new lump, ye unleavened." He looked at a Christian Church

as a brotherhood, as a community. The Corinthian Church had many graces from God. Jesus Christ, and him crucified was preached amongst them in purity, and people were gathered together who were babes in Christ; they were puffed up by the gifts of the Spirit amongst them, the word of utterance given to one, the word of prophecy given to another, the gift of healing bestowed upon some, and some gift bestowed upon all. They were puffed up when they should rather have mourned, and why? They were looking at God's gifts when they ought to have been looking at their own state. Like Israel of old, under Joshua, one Achan in the camp of Israel brought punishment and death upon the people of Israel. Here there was one found guilty of fornication, such as was not named among the Gentiles, and when they should have been mourning at the thought of such a thing, they were puffed up, and when they ought to have remembered that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, and so ought to have put away from them that evil wicked liver, as brother, they received him amongst them. They could boast of their preachers, they could rejoice in their doctrines, they could display their gifts, but they could not put out the evil, and they thus forgot that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. They were summoned therefore by the Holy Spirit of God to gather together for another purpose, not for the speaking with tongues, not for the delivery of prophecies, not for the power of preaching, but they were to meet together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to "deliver the corrupt brother to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." "Purge out, therefore, the old leaven."

Here, then, we have another channel of corruption

in the Church of Christ, that speaks with the voice of thunder to the Church of Christ this morning. Brethren, where are our congregational assemblies, in which we are to put away from us the old leaven? Where is the minister that assembles his people, and where are the people that are willing to assemble with their minister, that they may find a church of Christ able to fulfil the work of purging out the old leaven, not putting away false doctrines merely, not deciding whether your preachers are to be high church or low church, but whether the members of the Church of Christ be such as they ought to be, whether they be fornicators, whether they be adulterers, whether they be revilers, drunkards, or extortioners, persons with whom they ought not so much as to eat? If such a cause of corruption be set before us by the Spirit of God, it becomes us to consider why we permit that neglect of discipline which is so fearfully powerful to leaven the whole Church with corruption. But this is not the only danger: satan knows how to take advantage even of a love of truth, and to manage it so as to make it the destruction of truth. Many of the people aroused thus to consider the sinfulness of that individual were in danger of becoming too severe to him, and therefore the apostle says in the second chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians and the 7th verse, "Contrariwise, ye ought rather to forgive him and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow," and adds in the 11th verse, "lest Satan should get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices." The neglect therefore of ecclesiastical discipline is brought before our thoughts by the Holy Spirit as one reason why the kingdom of heaven will assuredly yet

become a corrupt mass at least in the corrupt part of it.

But we have another more subtle, more dangerous source of corruption, the pretence of a higher degree of spiritual-mindedness and purity. The philosophic error of the apostles' day was to make sin reside in the flesh, and holiness to be in the spirit. Now that is a truth in our renewed nature, but it is not a truth in our fallen condition: the mind has fallen as well as the body. The tendency of that philosophic error was to make people continue to look upon the flesh as being in itself an evil thing, instead of being so by the fall: and therefore to look upon the work of Christ, to be for ever to free the soul from the body, instead of believing the work of Christ to be the renewal of the body, to become a fit thing to be the habitation of a glorified soul. The apostle looked at this error as being so great, that he foretells that it would corrupt like a gangrene the church of Christ. He says in the second chapter of the Second Epistle to Timothy, and the 16th to the 18th verses, "But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase unto more ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a canker, of whom is Hymenæus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrown the faith of some." If this apparently pure spiritual doctrine, rising so high above the body, as the soul was to part from it and leave it for ever, if this apparently pure and spiritual doctrine were true, then the Christian religion would be untrue, for the apostle follows up that argument in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to Corinthians, where he reminds us that we believe the human body, the flesh and the

blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, to have been taken up into glory, and therefore to attribute essential sin to the flesh, would be, to be guilty of the blasphemy of attributing sin essentially to the blessed Saviour. "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" "Be not" he adds in the 33rd verse, "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners." False spirituality therefore is another of those leavening principles, of the evil of which we are forewarned, that it will eat as a gangrene, to the destruction of the corruptive part of the kingdom of heaven. Closely connected with that false spirituality, the scriptures also present to us, the form of Godliness without its power, as being another thing that is to prevail to the destruction of the condition of the kingdon of heaven. The apostle tells us in the 3rd chapter of the 2nd epistle to Timothy, verses 1 to 5 "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

Now from this last verse we learn, that the persons spoken of here were not apparently irreligious men, that is, they professed to be good men, and they had that mark upon them, they had the "form of godliness" but they had not its power; and further we are told, that "of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with

divers lusts, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Oh, what a mark of those that have a form of godliness and deny its power. They have not the same opinion for any length of time: of one speculative opinion to-day, attached to another party to-morrow, adopting a third the next, and never coming to a settled knowledge of the truth, although they are ever learning. They are not persons uninterested in religious questions, but they are uninterested in questions of true holiness. They can dispute very much about the form of godliness, how much grace may be given in baptism, or how little may be given in baptism, whether we have Christ at the Lord's table, or only the Holy Spirit at the Lord's table, whether we have an apostolic succession or whether we have not, whether the church be an infallible church, or whether it be one that may lead us astray. Interested in dark questions they are, yet they have nothing but the form of godliness, for they are not occupied with that better thing that will keep them from evil doing. They may have all these questions earnestly debated amongst them, yet fall into this destructive error that men should be lovers of their ownselves. The power of the christian religion is to make us lovers of our neighbours; the power of formal godliness is to make men lovers of their own selves, covetous because their hearts are set upon the world, boasters, because they know not that they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked — proud, because they have not learned of Him who was meek and lowly in heart — blasphemers, that is not blasphemers of God but evil speakers of others — disobedient to parents — unthankful and unholy. Forgetting that religion is not something separate from our nature, but something that purifies our nature, they are with-

out natural affection. Forgetting that he that is to stand upon God's holy hill is he that sweareth to his own heart and changeth not, they are truce-breakers. Forgetful that we should not speak evil of another upon insufficient evidence, they are false accusers. They are unable to restrain themselves, they are fierce, or as the word more properly means, ungentle, not lovers of them that are good, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. We may sum up therefore this evil, of the form of religion without its power, we may sum it up in the separating of religion from our natural condition; in separating the power of religion from the mere looking at it as a speculative truth. In close connection with this, we have false teachers. The apostle Peter in the 2nd chapter of the 2nd epistle, directs us to look back to the history of Israel, if we would learn the prospects of the Christian church, he tells us there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, "who privily should bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them." And these false teachers were to have many who would follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth should be evil spoken of. The prophet of old had to say "Mine heart is broken because of the prophets," and another could not find one to stand with him as a brother, but was compelled to exclaim, "I only am left! They have thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword." Here we have the Spirit of God warning us that the same thing was to overspread Christendom, there were to be false prophets with their abominable doctrines. And indeed we have had it most fearfully fulfilled in the kingdom of heaven. Who have been the great corrupters of Christian truth? The anointed priests of

the apostolic succession, those who could prove that they were in the church, and show their ordination, these have been the great upholders, the great teachers of error, the great corrupters of the souls of men, as we find in the 12th chapter of the Book of Revelation, it is foretold that the "sting of Satan's poison" was to "draw down the third part of the stars of heaven," that is the ministers of the Gospel, and to cast them to the earth. Therefore the apostle Paul taught by the same Spirit as was St. Peter, says in the 13th verse of the 3rd chapter of the 2nd epistle to Timothy, "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

Another form of this same corrupt leaven will be seen in the rejection of the true teachers by men heaping up to themselves false teachers. The Apostle in the 4th chapter and the 3rd verse of this same epistle goes on to say, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

There are two other evil principles which are foretold as being to work like leaven until the whole mass should be corrupted, the one the love of money, the other the love of the world. In the 6th chapter of the First Epistle to Timothy, at the 9th and three following verses, the apostle says, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after

righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." Let us go through the various parts of the Church of Christ, let us ask ourselves how many are there to be found who are not wishing to be rich? How many are there whom we could in the judgment of charity free from the love of money? How many are there who do not worship that golden image which the God of this world has set up? How many are there who shake their hands from holding of bribes? How many are there in whose hands are not found the wages of the oppressed hireling? How many are there who are not desirous of laying out their money to the best advantage, even though they get things at such a price as will not remunerate their neighbours? forgetting the old proverb of our common humanity, "Live and let live?" How many are there who can free themselves from the necessity of this admonition, "the love of money is the root of all evil?"

In the second chapter of the First Epistle of St. John we have this doctrine extended from the mere love of money to the love of the world itself. St. John says in the 15th, 16th and 17th verses, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." It is the supremacy of love, of which the Scripture here speaks. Have any of us ever felt a supreme love for another individual? Have we ever felt the omnipresence of that love, how it subordinates to it every other thing? Then we have felt that which the

apostle directs us here to give to the Father. It is not that we may not have our lawful affection for the useful things of life, but that we may have that energy and power of divine love within us, that will subordinate to itself every other thing, that we may feel that if the friend we love comes between our heart and God, that friend must depart and take a second place, and not dethrone God, whether it be the wife of our bosom, or the friend who is dear to us as our own soul, or whether it be the things of life, nothing must come between us, and the ability to say "there is none on earth that I desire besides thee." This is what the apostle means when he says, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Here are the leading evils of which the Scriptures point out to us as that leaven of which our Saviour spoke in our text: "it was hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened."

III. Let us in the last place, brethren, ask ourselves how are we to escape that evil leaven, or how are we to attain to that final blessedness? We have, blessed be God, simple clear teaching, and we have effectual power offered to us if we are only willing to submit to that teaching, and to give ourselves up to that power. Oh! let us set before us eternity, let us feel all the weight of those awful words: "He that is unjust let him be unjust still, he that is filthy let him be filthy still, he that is holy let him be holy still:" and remember, that if we have nourished in ourselves, knowingly nourished in our hearts, the little leaven it will assuredly pervade the whole of our moral nature until no holiness will be found in us, and we shall be but one mass of sin. If we let the God-banishing thought to be even as a little principle within us, it will work on

until God is banished from our thoughts, and we shall first say to him, "depart from us," and he will say lastly to us, "depart from me: he that is unholy let him be unholy still." Now our Saviour gives us one declaration respecting the means of escaping that fearful judgment, that overspreading corruption, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath he cannot be my disciple." There must be an entire and perfect self-surrender, a self surrender of all that we value here, a surrender of all that we have; and if we do not, the little unsurrendered part will be the leaven of corruption that will overspread the whole mass. There must, therefore, be an entire self-surrender, or we have not begun to purge out the leaven of malice and wickedness that will corrupt our hearts. We have the means if this be the fundamental principle, and our great means is clinging faster to the truth which we have already received. The youthful Timothy was an appointed example to us how we are to escape from that evil leaven. If you turn again to the 3rd chapter of the Second Epistle to Timothy, you will find the apostle saying in the 14th and 15th verses, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise even unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus." Here then we have Timothy's instructors, "knowing of whom thou hast received them," we have the means of instruction,—the "Holy Scriptures." The especial person to whom he refers was Paul himself: "And Timothy, my own son in the faith." But there were two other instructors that Timothy had: "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in

thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice." Here then we have three means of instruction which are to keep us from the evils of the last day, domestic instruction, pastoral instruction, and both of those with the Holy Scriptures in their hands, "which are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus." This is the external means then provided for our deliverance from evil men and seducers. If we turn to the 2nd chapter of the First Epistle of St. John, we shall find the apostle saying there in the 26th and 27th verses, "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you, but the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." Vain would be the outward teaching, vain would be the Holy Scriptures, if there were not within this holy unction. "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you." You will be kept from the seductions by the anointing that abideth in you, that is truth and is no lie. And if we compare this with the apostle St. Jude, he tells us also respecting seducers in the 20th and 21st verses, how we are to keep ourselves from their seductions. "But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." As the Christain church is a brotherhood, they are here represented in the associate character. If there be the inward unction that each individual has, there is the outward bond sanctified by the Spirit, which the whole community has. But seducers separate themselves, they

know not the Spirit possessed by the true people of God. These build up themselves in their most holy faith, they pray for the power of the Holy Ghost, they keep themselves in the love of God, they look for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. This is further confirmed by the voice of another prophet in the 3rd chapter of the Second Epistle of Peter. The apostle speaking of the errors of the wicked says, in the 17th and 18th verses, "Ye therefore beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness, but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to him be glory both now and for ever, Amen." Oh! brethren, how solemnly should the Saviour's warning fall upon our ears, how solemnly should the Saviour's teaching arouse our consciences, how vividly should the bright glow of eternal holiness keep itself before our minds, how fearfully should those words ring in our ears, "he that is unjust let him be unjust still." How earnestly should we remember that we are indeed a brotherhood in Christ, that we have our mutual influences, that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump;" and pray that we may be able to "purge out the old leaven," that we may be a new lump, that we may indeed be building up each other n our most holy faith, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and preparing for the blessed brotherhood of the redeemed, when our blessed Saviour shall say to us, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART VI.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE.

ST. MATTHEW, xiii. v. 44.—*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.*

Our state of renewal by grace is nothing more than our natural state freed from disorder and sin, and brought into abiding contact with the Divine Being. At the close of a parching, scorching summer day, the whole herbage looking drooping, ready to die, the night comes on, and the silent influences which accompany the darkness descend upon the drooping herbage, the morning arises, the face of nature is refreshed, and the light of heaven is resplendent from that restored renewed face of nature. Here is that which illustrates to us the operations of divine grace upon the natural condition of man, worn down with the burden of his corruption, wearied with the weight of his troubles, distracted by the perplexities of sin, man's nature is distorted, is corrupted, is defiled, and in the stillness of darkness God sends down the dew of his Spirit, the refreshing power is seen, the light of the Sun of righteousness rises upon his nature, and we perceive in the renewed soul the power of divine grace, and the beauty of the reflection of divine holiness.

Yet it is the same nature still, man's affections, man's thoughts, man's energies, restored, renewed, refreshed, and gladdened with the bright light of heaven; but it is human still. If this be true of our being, it is also true of our modes of being; it is true of the desires of our hearts, of the affections of our souls, of the thoughts of our minds, and of the energies of our bodies. And this truth is intimated in the joy of discovering the hidden treasure, as we shall see more fully as I unfold the parable. Jesus said, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."

The parable was given privately, not to the multitude, but to the disciples, when they had accompanied their Master into the house; and yet there does not appear anything peculiar in the parable, why it should have been given privately. It was, probably, simply the increased instruction which our blessed Saviour gave to those who were more constantly about his person. Some have thought that it may have been predicted of Jew and Gentile. They have gathered the idea from the prediction of the 65th chap. of Isaiah, in which the Lord declares the way of the calling in of the Gentiles, "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name." The apostle, in the 10th chap. of the Epistle to the Romans, applies that in the 20th verse to the calling in of the Gentiles in the place of the Jews: "But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was [illegible] manifest with them that asked not after me." But [illegible] nnection with the next parable forbids the idea of

Jews and Gentiles in this place, because if this refer to the Gentile finding a treasure which he did not expect, the next would refer to the Jew finding a treasure he did expect: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." For the same apostle represents the Jews as following after the law of righteousness, and not attaining to it. We are not, therefore, to look for any prediction of Jew or Gentile in this parable. It teaches, in reality, an individual lesson; and, brethren, it teaches us a very solemn heart-searching lesson, an individual lesson, respecting our spiritual condition. The natural allusion here is to what commonly takes place in the East. We know from the frequent confusion of its governments, from its political and social troubles and disorganizations, that men who have wealth are obliged to hide part of it, and to conceal from the knowledge of all around where they had hidden it. Now, through the mischances of these social disorders, the owners of that wealth are often unable to recover it again; persons, consequently, purchasing fields, will unexpectedly find the treasures which were thus left by their former owners; and Christ brings this thought before us,—a man is in a field. Some consider him a workman labouring in the field, but the parable says nothing of that; it is simply a casual visitor in a field, who, having discovered that there is a treasure in the field, wishes to get possession of it, and so to get possession of it as that people cannot dispute his ownership; for, having found the treasure, he might have taken it out of the field, and instead of hoarding it he might have taken it home and appropriated it, but then he would have been in continual danger of losing the treasure.

He wished to get it in such a way as that the law will secure him in the possession of it, and therefore he hides the treasure in the field, discloses to no one what he had found there, goes and buys the field from its legal owner, and thus becomes the legal possessor of the treasure of the field, and becomes legally entitled to the treasure: "He goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."

Whether this was a right thing for him to do or not is not the purpose of this parable. The object of the parable is not to teach whether the man that found the treasure did right or did wrong, but whether we may learn from the conduct of the man something that suits our own circumstances in life. In comparing things, parabolic teaching consists simply in the resemblance, not in the excellence or otherwise of the thing from which the resemblance is drawn, for sometimes that resemblance is to be carried out in moral contrast rather than in similarity of imitation. For example, the unjust judge Christ presents to us as something to remind us of the all-just Judge, the maker of all the earth, who cannot but do right; the comparison in that parable is by contrast, that if an unjust judge will deliver an importunate widow, how much more will the just Judge do so. And again, in the unjust steward, the comparison is by contrast, that if a man whose desires, and hopes, and fears were merely bounded by the grave, if he calculated upon and acted prudently for the future, how much more should those whose desires, and hopes, and fears are as boundless as heaven, and as enduring as eternity? And so, in this parable, it does not necessarily belong to the instruction, whether the man did right or did wrong, in concealing the knowledge of the treasure. What Christ

brings before our thoughts in this was the joy he had in finding that treasure, the earnest desire he had to obtain possession of it: "he went and sold all that he had, and bought that field." From this parable, then, we must consider three things:—

I. Man's universal desire for a treasure.

II. The unexpected discovery of a treasure.

And lastly. The practical value set upon it.

Man's universal desire for a treasure arises out of the very nature of creatures; no being but God is self-containing, no being but God is self-satisfying, and it could not be that the creature could find within himself the satisfaction of his own nature,—that belongs alone to God. We must, therefore, of necessity seek outside ourselves for that which is to satisfy our nature and our being: and here is one deep truth intimated to us in this parable, this man found a treasure that suited his desires, and he went and sold all that he had, that he might obtain possession of that treasure. Let us examine our own nature, brethren; and is there one of us who does not feel, that it is from what is external to ourselves that we must find our satisfaction? The heart must find some object or other, the mind must find some outward subject upon which to exercise itself, the energy of body cannot be occupied solely with itself, it must find something upon which to exercise its energies; we all need some treasure, something that can satisfy our nature, that can fill our being; and therefore that universal cry that rises from the whole world, "who will show us any good?" This, then, is the first truth which our Saviour brings before us here, the feeling of the want of some treasure, of some satisfying portion in every human being, and I might say in every created being.

II. Now, in considering the manner in which this treasure was found, our Lord brings before us this thought respecting the kingdom of heaven,—it was found unexpectedly: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which, when a man hath *found*, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." Here, then, is the treasure not looked for but found, unexpectedly found. How much is implied in that one word, *found*. Men think that they know how to seek their own satisfaction when they are crying out, "Who will show us any good?" We are all looking for the good that our own hearts choose, for the good that we think will make ourselves happy: the mighty man rejoices in his strength, the wise man rejoices in his wisdom, the ambitious man longs for honours, and all men by nature long for that which their own hearts will choose,—the treasure that will satisfy their hearts. And God permits all men to make the choice, and to a certain extent to try the choice; and it is not solely by disappointments in not attaining to the objects of our desires, but by the bitter disappointments of the attainment of our desires that God teaches this serious and bitter lesson which our nature has to learn before we can find the treasure. We make our choice according to the predominant character of our nature, not necessarily sinful things, but even lawful things. It is not what we choose for ourselves that can give us the true treasure of our being, or of our nature. And that is a great lesson taught us here. He gives the treasure; it is a hidden one; it is a thing found. It is, indeed, true of every human being, what our Lord Jesus Christ said of those chosen privileged ones that were permitted to accompany him

through his ministry, and to see him, and to learn where and whose was that heavenly treasure that can satisfy our being: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit." It was not we that loved him, but he that loved us, and gave himself for us. Therefore Christ says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field;" unseen, unknown. Men are in its neighbourhood, but they know nothing about it; their feet, perhaps, upon the soil that covers it, and yet they are unaware of the treasure in the field, until some apparently accidental circumstance discloses that treasure to them, which indeed can satisfy their nature, and they are gladdened with joy, and they sell all that they have to get it.

Now, brethren, what can this treasure be of which our blessed Saviour speaks, but that which could indeed be a treasure? The apostle tells us, that in the blessed Saviour are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in him is to be found the blessedness and the fulness of all satisfaction, and the gladness of all joy. It was to make men acquainted with him that the apostle says, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." This is the treasure of which our blessed Saviour speaks, "the unsearchable riches of Christ:" that which was not desired by human hearts, that which was not thought of by human wisdom, that which was not obtained by human strength, but that which was found by human beings to the praise and glory of him that gave that unsearchable treasure.

But the treasure is declared to be hid in a field. It had something to cover it up, and then it was found

within. It is not onething or another, but all the things which Christ has to give us, "the unsearchable riches of Christ." It is not only Christ himself, nor is it one doctrine or another about Christ, but it is Christ with all the riches that he has to bestow upon us; Christ with all his imparted graces, and with all his imparted bounties, this is the hidden treasure for which we must sell all that we have, if we would buy that treasure. Whatever are the fruits of the Spirit,—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,—whatever are the satisfying portions of our nature, these are to be found in Christ. But they are hid in Christ, and as the Lord speaks here of a field that concealed and at the same time contained that treasure, so Christ has various dispensations of his providence to each of us, that conceal and also contain the treasures of Christ's unsearchable riches. It is not in one moment that we can obtain these riches. The Lord is not merely speaking here of the doctrine of justification by faith, in which the sinner can look to the Saviour and be pardoned, but he is speaking comprehensively of all the riches which the kingdom of heaven has to bring before us. And so the field here is not the world as it was in some of the other parables; nor is it the church, as some would make the field, but it is each dispensation of Christ's dealings towards us that contains some hid treasure of Christ's boundless riches for us. The world in its engagements is part of that field, the church with its ordinances is part of that field, the family scene with its duties and enjoyments is another part of the same field. It is, in a word, each one thing that contains something within it from Christ unto souls. It may come in the form of a [illegible]ness or of a worldly enjoyment, or in any other form,

and it applies to everything that has within it anything from Christ to us: In this point of view, the field is indeed everything, because all things contain within them something from Christ to his people, inasmuch as "all things shall work together for good to them that love God." And here we can take a new view of the parable of life. We can see hidden in each event, in each feeling, in each thought, in each duty, in everything, the very smallest in life even, something of the unsearchable riches of Christ, that inestimable treasure which, when discovered by any one, he counts all things but loss for the sake of possessing that field which containeth a treasure so boundless in its wealth, and so enduring in it permanence.

III. In the last place, our Saviour represents to us the practical value which that man set upon this treasure. He hid the treasure in the field, and went and made himself legal possessor of the field, that he might become lawfully possessed of its treasure. Here, then, we have indeed a deep instruction to our own souls. If that field applies to all the circumstances of our being, how are we, like this man, to become legally possessed of everything that may thus legally convey to us the treasure that is contained in it? There is but one way by which that can be done: we must obtain it by becoming his disciples, at the sacrifice of all things. This man could not become the legal possessor of the field, until for joy, at discovering the value of its treasure he went and sold all that he had, and bought that field. Now, our Lord tells us the same respecting himself, in the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke, where he says, in the 33rd verse, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he

hath, he cannot be my disciple." These are awful words, and they are blessed words. No man regrets giving a great deal, if he gets in exchange a great deal more. No man would object to give the gold that filled his house, if he were to get its weight in diamonds in return. He would not think upon that which he had given, but upon that which he had received. But why does it seem so difficult for men to have demanded from them all that they have? Just because they shut their eyes to all they receive. If Christ says, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple," does he not tell us that he gives himself in exchange for the whole that is given, the gold of his unsearchable riches for the gold that perisheth? The apostle Paul had counted the cost of the value of the one in comparison with the other, and he tells us in the 3rd chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians, v. 7 and 8, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, yea, doubtless; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but nothing that I may win Christ." Here then is, according to the teaching of this parable, the very primary condition to becoming legally possessed of the heavenly treasure. We must for it forsake all that we have; we must continuously forsake it; we must depart from the one, that we may enter into the fulness of the blessedness of the other. So the prophet of old admonished, and in admonishing instructed the Jews of his time, as you will find in the 9th chapter of Jeremiah, v. 23-24: "Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but

let him that glorieth glory in this that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." On the one side there is our own chosen treasure; there is what our own soul would choose, what our own understanding would choose, and what our own energies would labour for. On the other there is a crucified Saviour, and a glorified Saviour, and the road that leads from the cross to the crown. You cannot keep on both roads: "no man can serve two masters." You cannot dwell part of the time in the one field, and then part of the time in the other field; you must transfer yourself from one possession to the other possession: "Whosoever he be that forsaketh not all that he hath," cannot be the disciple of Jesus; he cannot be entitled to that heavenly, blessed treasure. How very solemnly was that taught by the prophet Haggai, when addressing the very best people on earth. We read in the first chapter of his prophecy, in the 5th verse: "Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, consider your ways." They had forsaken a great deal, but they had not forsaken all that they had. They had left the fertile plains of Babylon, they had left the comfortable protection of the Persian empire, they had showed a zeal for God beyond their other Jewish brethren who remained in those worldly comfortable dwellings; they had gone up to Jerusalem, and encountered disquiet and discomfort; they had built the walls of Jerusalem, and set up the altar of God in its streets; they had shown such zeal and courage, as to labour with the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other; they had shown such earnestness for the worship of God, as in the very face of their enemy to build

up the altar of God, and to restore the priesthood and the sacrifices; and yet they had not done the whole. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, consider your ways." Let us suppose this congregation, obedient to the voice of God, were to leave our houses and our business here, and to go a distant journey to Jerusalem; that we were willing to dwell there, and to expose our families to the incursions of the enemies around, to submit to all the inconveniences which such a removal would cause, to rebuild that city at our own expense, at the devotion of our persons and the very risk of our lives; and that there we had shown such earnestness in divine worship, as to meet in the streets regularly, daily, morning and evening, for worship,—would we not be looked upon by society around, as some of the most devoted people the world ever saw? And yet it was to a people who had done this that the Lord said, "Now, therefore, consider your ways. The heaven over you shall be stayed from dew, and the earth from her fruit, because ye dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lieth waste, saith the Lord." Now, they were men who had forsaken all they had, for we read that that reproof sank deep into their souls, "For the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, and the spirit of Joshua, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people, and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." And they obtained the blessing, for we read in the next chapter, "Consider now, from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, from this day will I bless you."

Brethren, it is a solemn thing to hear these words of

Christ: that man sold all that he had: have you sold all that you have? He who preaches, and they who hear, we all have need, great need, to ask ourselves the same question,—have we sold all that we have? Have we given up more than our own sins? Have we given up our own self-will? Have we given up our own wisdom? Have we given up our own treasures? Have we transferred ourselves from our own service to Christ's service? Have we chosen the unsearchable riches of Christ? Every hour and every day can test whether we have done so. Are we able to look upon all things as bringing some treasure from Christ to us? And are we willing to sell all to obtain that treasure? Can we account the loss of our goods a treasure to us, if it bring greater submission to Christ? Can we count the mortification of our vanity a blessing to us, if it makes us more humbly prostrate before Christ? Can we count like the apostle, the disappointments in the world, the things we lose in it as things filled with blessing, if they bring us to him who is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, and who never disappoints the heart that waits upon him? Can we apply to ourselves this blessed language: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life or death, or things present or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's?" The apostle does not merely say, "I count all things but loss," but "I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." And now, if this parable teaches us thus to look at the hidden treasure contained in all things, what a view does it give us of the treasures that are in the world around us. Is not every human soul a treasure for which Christ died? Is not every uninstructed soul a treasure for which Christ

died? Is not every opportunity of good to souls an unspeakable treasure committed to human beings and to human hearts? Yet how do we esteem these unspeakable treasures, the enduring treasures for which Christ died. We have our "ceiled houses," and the "Lord's house is lying waste."

We have our thousands around us, uninstructed and uncared for. We have our distant colonies dependant upon us, to which our sons and daughters, in the need of seeking the bread which perisheth, have been obliged to go, forsaking family and home, because the necessities of life pressed heavily upon them. A cry from them comes to us, "Come and help us; we need ministers; we need churches; we are souls for which Christ died; we are your flesh and your bone; we are your countrymen; come, give something to us; give ministers to us; give churches to us; give the Gospel to us; share the treasures of the Gospel with us; we are Christ's treasures, Christ's jewels; he redeemed us from ignorance; bring us from sin, bring us to holiness, bring us to heaven, bring us to Christ." Are we ready, then, to forsake all that we have? Are we ready to do like those Jews of old, who went up to the mountain to cut down the timber, to spend our time and our earnestness, and our zeal and our money, upon the Lord's house, that it may be built, sending forth labourers into the Lord's harvest?

We have a very especial call upon us this day, and it is now just one hundred and fifty years since the Lord stirred up the hearts of faithful men to commence in very feebleness that mighty operation which has since developed itself in the two great streams of the "Chris-

tian Knowledge Society," and "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel." Three fifty-years have now closed,—the third jubilee comes upon us,—the voice of God, in the third of these fifties, is now speaking to us; and what does it say? Can God praise this nation of England, praise this church of England, for forsaking all that she has for his praise and glory? We boast of our colonies, and talk often of that sceptre which sways over lands upon which the sun never sets, of those almost measureless countries where we have our race spread, east and west and north and south, our own flesh and blood dwell there,—are we stirred up as we ought, to send to them men to preach the Gospel, to send forth labourers into their harvest? If we are not doing so, then we have not done what this parable teaches; we are not selling all that we have; and we may be but rejoicing selfishly in our Gospel privileges, as we vainly call them. If we have not done this, we have done worse than nothing. We have been hearing Christ's words, and treating them as though they were empty words. In the last day all our time, all our thoughts, all our opportunities, all our talents, all our money shall stand on one side, and we shall stand on the other, and the Judge shall be there, and those terrible words shall be said, "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: go into the land of faithfulness. He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much: go into the land of unfaithfulness: who will commit to you the true riches."

Oh, brethren! let us in earnestness, in self-rejection, in self-humiliation, and in dependant prayer, pour out our hearts before Him from whom we have sadly wan-

[redacted] we have but slightly attended, to [redacted] we have not given heed. "Now, there[redacted] of hosts, consider your ways." [redacted] enable us to count all we have [redacted] all, to buy that inestima[redacted] riches of Christ; and may [redacted] and chosen ones, in that [redacted] glorified in his saints, and [redacted] believe.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART VII.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

ST. MATTHEW xiii. 45, 46.—"*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*"

"Who will show us any good?" is the cry of the deep necessities of our nature. We must seek our satisfaction somewhere, and we seek it everywhere, where we think we have any chance of finding the satisfaction of our nature. Our blessed Saviour represents to us by these two parables, that of last Sunday and this one again to-day, "the pearl of great price," a different aspect of the kingdom of heaven from what he had done in the former. In the former we have men very much passive: there is the sower sowing the seed, and the heart is the passive recipient of the seed; and there was the wheat and the tares; but here, as in the former one, we have man laying hold of the good that is presented to him. Unexpected and unsought as was the treasure hid in the field, yet when the man found that treasure he had to sell all that he had to buy it. Not unsought, but yet perhaps unpaid for, is the representation given to us here of the merchantman seeking goodly pearls. The

expression of the wants of his heart was in this,—he was *seeking* goodly pearls. He was willing to lay out his money to obtain that which he desired in his heart. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls." The sort of thing for which he sought is implied in the expression, "a goodly pearl." Common pearls are easily obtained: goodly ones, such as the merchantman was seeking for, are not easily obtained. Christ represents this merchantman as not being satisfied with the common treasures which could be obtained every day. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking *goodly* pearls." It was a high and noble object so far as numerous earthly treasures that this man had before him. It was the goodness of the pearl that our Saviour especially brings before our thoughts. Here, therefore, the kingdom of heaven is presented to us under the aspect of a human being, seeking his meat of something great and good to satisfy his nature, but not the *operations* of that human being, for he looked to many sources of gratification. He was not seeking one pearl of great price, but seeking many pearls, that from each one he might obtain some degree of satisfaction, hoping from the whole together to obtain the fulness of his joy. "He is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly *pearls*:" looking to one thing and another, to each for its own channel of satisfying power to him, that he might have the riches that his heart sought for. Now, while engaged in this search, he finds one pearl incomparably beyond all others: its price was very large, because its value was very great: its price demanded everything that he had, but its value was so inestimable in his eyes that he counted all that he had worth giving for it. "When he had found one pearl of great

price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Such is the resemblance of the kingdom of heaven, which our Saviour presents to our thoughts here. If we consider the nature of a pearl, we shall find that it has one or two striking features which render it peculiarly descriptive of the value of the kingdom of heaven. Christ does not speak here of the diver who went to the bottom of the sea to find the pearl, but of the merchantman who would purchase it from the hand of him who had gone down into the depth of the sea to find that pearl: and Christ was not found at the bottom of the sea, by man; it was another than man who had sought and found Christ there. Just as the pearl is formed in the waters of the ocean, so was Christ produced from the midst of the sea of our humanity, brought up from the depths of the same, and presented in all the glory and all the beauty of his person by Him alone who could do so. "The holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." This goodly pearl did not differ in its nature, it differed only in its perfectness from all other pearls that could be presented for sale to that merchantman. It is, indeed, a rare thing to find a pearl large, and perfectly pure: it is a common thing to find small pearls, but tainted ones. And is it not thus with Him who is indeed "the pearl of great price," who is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; for he took not on him the nature of angels, but took on him the seed of Abraham, made in all points like unto his brethren, sin only excepted. From heaven came down the Divine nature of Christ, but from the sea of our humanity came up his human nature; and it came like this goodly pearl, without spot, or stain, or wrinkle, or any such thing, that if the heart of man needs the heart of a man on which to rest for satisfac-

tion, and if it cannot rest upon the heart of a spotted and sinful humanity for the fulness of its joy and satisfaction, it finds the heart of a man in Him unspotted, untainted, holy, and pure. "For such an high-priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens:" "For we have not an high-priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but we have one who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." And here, indeed, in the midst of the many other pearls that could be found at the bottom of the ocean is this, the only pearl of great price, untainted, unspotted, worth the price of all we have to get it.

There is another very striking feature connected with the pearl: it is especially the jewel fitted for the daylight. We do not find the diamond spoken of in Scripture in the same connexion as we do the pearl. Our festivals are most of them by night, and the diamond glitters in the brightness that we can kindle in our nightly lights: but the pearl shines best by day, and so it is indeed a beautiful image of Him whose human nature, in the resplendance of the Divine brightness, is the true day, that alone can pour pure light upon this world, and is thus the refulgent pearl of great price, fitted to shine forth to the praise and glory of the Divine Being, received upon the beauteous surface of perfected humanity; the one pearl of great price, who is especially the jewel of the day; the prize that is chosen by the heart, and precious to the souls of those who are not children of the night, with all its pleasures of darkness, but are the children of the day, with all its pleasures of holiness and blessed enjoyment. And in this point of

we do not find the pearl in all the precious stones

that form the garnishing of that heavenly city, that holy Jerusalem that cometh down out of heaven from God. All the walls of that city were built of various precious stones: there the jasper, the sapphire, the chalcedony, the emerald, and the sardonyx, and other precious stones, but no pearls. It is only at the gates of that city that we find the pearl. There each gate was one pearl. And this fixes the pearl of great price upon our blessed Saviour: it is the image that is intended to set before us the Lord Jesus Christ, the true gate into the city of the everlasting God, the true entrance into the holy city, the new Jerusalem, which has the glory of God; the divine and heavenly city, which can alone be the light of the glory of a purified and glorified world. Every separate gate was one pearl, not a collection of pearls joined together with any curious skill of the workman, but each one pearl, such as earth never saw for greatness or for glory. One pearl, large enough to be the gate of the eternal city, and pure enough to stand there unspotted in the brightness of everlasting light. Although there were twelve gates to that city, each gate was formed only of one thing, one whole undivided thing, one pearl, in order to show us the true entrance into God's everlasting kingdom, into the heavenly city; not that it is intended to set before us twelve saviours, but each being but a symbol, they all set before us the one Saviour. And the same we find in the tabernacle built by Moses, we have a curtain at the entrance, a curtain into the priestly part, and a curtain into the entrance of the holiest of all, made of the same materials. Christ in the beginning, Christ in the middle, Christ in the end. So it is with this heavenly city: into whatever gate you desire to enter, wherever you can find

an opening in the walls, and a gate there, you see the same thing before you: every single gate was according to one fashion, made of one material—Christ. Each one was intended to open out to us the same One Being, He who alone can say, "I am the door; by me, if any man enter in, he shall go in and out, and find pasture." Here is that gate which is never shut, an entrance into the holy city, which being thus always open, those who are prepared shall enter therein. The defiled shall not enter there. And yet those that had been defiled, but are now washed, and sanctified, and made white, these shall find their ingress and their egress to that everlasting city, which is indeed the glory of God and the blessedness of everlasting joy. Thus we have Christ himself set before us in this beautiful figure of the pearl of great price, which was found by this merchantman in the world, and for which he most gladly went and sold all that he had that he might buy that one inestimable pearl. If St. John tells us that our Saviour is the pearl of great price, St. Peter testifies to the inestimable value, as the other testifies to the nature, of the pearl, as you will find in the second chapter of the First Epistle of St. Peter, where he says in the fourth verse, "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." He is the one pearl, precious in the sight of God, disallowed of men, but precious in the sight of the Lord. And in the seventh verse he tells us, that he is also precious in the sight of those who have found his value. "Unto you, therefore, which believe he is precious." This, then, is another feature of the kingdom of heaven, that those who are to obtain that inestimable treasure are taught by the grace of God to seek for something good, for something noble, for

something satisfying; and never did any one soul seek for that good that did not obtain it, and enter into the fulness of its blessedness. "They that seek him early shall find him." "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." How are we all taught here the ignorance of those who are seeking for that goodly pearl "He was seeking goodly pearls." It is not, brethren, our own skill or our own knowledge that reveals to us the inestimable treasure; it is only when we are disappointed in other treasures that we really seek for Christ as the pearl above all price. And even the converted heart has to confess the same thing: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept thy word." One of the most comforting truths respecting the dealings of God with our own souls is, that his inestimable love is willing to receive the disappointed broken-hearted man, that he does not reproach us with all our erring ways, for every vanity; he does not reject us because we have spent our strength upon other things, and only come to him when we have found the dissatisfaction of other joys. He giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and if we have been seeking one pearl and another, if we have made trial of ten thousand channels of joy to us, and one after another found them to disappoint us, that does not hinder Him who knows our frame, who remembers that we are but dust, from receiving us. When we are willing to come in at last, he allows us to be like the prodigal who wasted his father's goods and went from his father's presence, and was sunk down to be but a feeder of swine, only to be recovered to a sense of himself by the experience of his degeneration, who returned to his father's home, and when he was a good way off, his father ran and met

him, and fell upon his neck and kissed him. It is in the experience that every one of our hearts leads us to, that we may learn the true comfort that is in Christ. He does not reject us because we have been seeking other pearls. He often permits us to do so, that when we find the emptiness of the one we may find the fulness and everlasting blessedness of the other. "He found one pearl of great price, and sold all that he had to obtain it."

Now if Christ be this pearl of great price, we have earnestly to consider how it is that we are to obtain Christ.

I. We must, as we have seen in the last parable, obtain *legal* possession of Christ.

II. We must obtain *actual* and *real* possession of Christ.

There are two ways in which the pearl of great price can thus be obtained. The one, when the soul discovers himself to be a lost sinner; when he has made an effort in all his own strength to obtain heaven by his own deserving, or to obtain satisfaction from his own efforts in the world, and finds the emptiness of the whole, and the nature of his guilt, and the wretchedness of his misery, and then sees that God hath laid on Christ the iniquity of us all; when he can see that Christ, having borne our sins, became our substitute, and that we may change places with him and make Christ ours, all the blood that he shed, our atoning blood; all the sufferings that he endured, our sufferings; all the merit that he acquired, our merit; all the title that the Son of man, the Son of God had to heaven and its eternal blessedness, all that, ours, by simple faith in him. Here is the first and great step by which we become possessed of that pearl of great

price, by which we take Christ as our own, having sold all that we had to get it; sold all, that is, giving it up, not giving it up in payment to God, but yet giving it away as the price that we have to pay for Christ; as the Lord says to the ignorant and miserable bishop of the church of Laodicea, in the 18th verse of the 3rd chap. of the Book of Revelations: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." Not that we have to pay a price for it: we have to pay nothing for it to God or Christ, as he says in the 58th chapter of the prophet Isaiah: "Ho! every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight in fatness." We must indeed sell all that we have; that is, we must surrender all that we have. We must give up our own doings, our own deservings, our own sufferings, our own merits of any kind. We must entirely take Christ as the substitute for us, not to be mixed with us; and we must stand in his place as he stood in ours. We must consider Christ as our substitute, the thing that became ours, which we can present to God as our title, and which does indeed entitle us to heaven. And in this point of view he is indeed the pearl of great price: "Unto you that believe he is precious." Oh! of what priceless value to the guilty conscience is that cross that takes away all our guilt. Of what priceless value to the burdened soul is that One who can say, "Come unto me all

that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Of what priceless value to the desiring, needy heart is He who can say, "Incline your ear and come unto me: hear, and your souls shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Thus we must not mix up two things together: we must give up the one that we may obtain the other. And he who is thus able to look to Christ and make him his own, has cast away everything of his own that he may take him, is sure of finding that pearl of great price, which can make him rich, and make him blessed, not for time only, but also for eternity.

II. But if we are to have Christ purchased by us in this manner, without money and without price, we are also to obtain Christ in the impartation of his nature as well as in the imputation of his merits. And here we have that other exhortation to us: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof." We must obtain the heart of Christ in us in the communion of heart with heart, as Christ himself speaks to his people. If there was the fundamental love of Christ, by which, looking at us in our wretchedness and sin, he bestowed his love upon us all, bestowed his affections upon us all, there is the communication of the love of Christ and the reception of our love by Christ, which is the characteristic of the continuance of the Christian love, which is the continually increasing riches of the converted, consistent, Christ-seeking heart. We find our Saviour himself speaking and exhorting us in the 15th chapter of St. John, and the 10th verse, where he says, "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." And here, brethren, is

another application of the acquisition of the pearl of great price, which belongs to every one of us as an incitement to go forward, growing in grace, and acquiring more and more of the communicated light and being of the Lord Jesus Christ to us. We can add to our treasures from day to day, as we are seeking for the pearl of great price. Christ joins himself to all the knowledge that we have in this world, all the things that we have in this world, Christ the light and the brightness that gives value to them all. In this point of view, our Saviour said, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but labour for the meat which endureth to everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you." Christ not only gave himself upon the cross for us, but Christ gives himself to us in the dispensations of his grace and goodness on earth, and especially in that holy ordinance in which he has provided himself as heavenly food for our souls. And in this manner we have set before us the seeking for the pearl of great price, as you will find in the 2nd chapter of Proverbs, where the wise man says, "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee, so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding: yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding, if thou seekest her as silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." The pearl of great price in this respect, then, is found in portions from day to day, as we go on in our earnest search, in the Christian life. "In him," the apostle says, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." They are hidden there as in a safe treasure-house, where we can find all things. In the recorded life of our blessed Saviour in the Gospels, we have set before u

what treasures are to be found in him. The riches of his grace, the depths of his teaching, the brightness of his example, the warmth of his love, the completeness of his self-surrender, the willingness of his giving of himself to all those who are willing to go to him for the teaching and the supply which their necessities demand; and in the ordinances of his church, as well as in the business of the world, we should in the same way seek Christ as the unsearchable riches; that as the whole world without the sun would be darkness, so all those ordinances without him would be but emptiness, and worse than nothing, and vanity. And yet they are fitted to convey to us all that is indeed the pearl of great price. In the various dispensations of life, or rather of providence or of grace, we can find Christ in them all, become the pearl of great price; and in each one we must have the same principle running through the whole: he sold all that he had to buy that. Our self-surrender is not a momentary surrendering; it is a continual one: "Always bearing about in the body of the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal bodies. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

To acquire the pearl of great price, in this second point of view, then, is to have gradually imparted to us Christ; Christ giving himself to us, Christ working his own graces in us, Christ enriching us with the unsearchable treasure of his most blessed self.

Brethren, is this your experience of the kingdom of heaven? Have you yet made the beginning of seeking the goodly pearl? Or, are your hearts still seeking amongst the lower corrupted, tainted pearls, that are so common

in the world, the satisfaction they desire? If you are satisfied with that which is tainted and corrupted, you are not seeking the goodly pearl: you have to begin your work. If, on the other hand, you are seeking the goodly pearl, and have not yet found it; if you are desiring that which alone is worth calling good, spotless holiness, pure joy, heavenly brightness; and if you have not yet found it, you assuredly shall as certainly as that God's word is true. Here is the practical application of this seeking of the goodly pearl, which may be of great blessing and comfort to many a wearied, darkened, troubled spirit that hears me this morning. As saith the Prophet, "Who is among you, that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." It does not follow, that we are not to find the pearl because we have not yet obtained it. If we feel our darkness, if we feel our sin, if we are willing to give np all that we have to find it, we assuredly shall find it. Brethren, if you have not found that pearl of great price, the reason is not in Christ; the reason is in yourselves. What is it that withholds you from taking Christ as the inestimable pearl? What is that can be in the creature, that can hold you back from giving up all that you have to him? Can there be more joy in the things of the world than in Christ, than in the same worldly things glorified by Christ? Can it be, that you doubt his willingness to give himself to you? Look to Calvary, and see him hanging there for you. When we were enemies he died for us, that he might bring us to God. Does he come to call the righteous, or does he not rather come to call sinners to repentance? There is no reason why this might not be the hour in which

you might indeed find him. If you have been seeking him, you may this morning find him the pearl of great price, who asks you to take him who is bearing with your long-continued refusals of him, if indeed you have done so. But what is it, to take Christ? Is it only to take him as our escape from hell? To take him, that we may have him when we die, and must leave this world? No! brethren. To take Christ is not only to take him as the sin-pardoner, but as the soul-cleanser; to take him as the satisfaction of the heart, as the supplier of all our need, the deliverer from all our burdens, the wonderful, him of whom we can say, "This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!" To take him not only as our substitute, by whom we have pardon from God; but as our companion, who shall walk with us in the road of life, that we deem our very heaven to be where we may the more sweetly find his sustaining love; that permits us to be spotted with the pollutions of this world, that he may teach how it is that we can only find our washing and cleansing in him, and yet who has promised never to leave us, never to be absent from us, always to supply our need, always to be with us in heavenly wisdom; always to bear with us in patient long-suffering, always to feel for us in most tender compassion, and finally to bring us faultless into the presence of the Divine glory with exceeding joy. Oh! may we indeed be taught of God not only to seek, but to find this pearl of great price; throughout our whole lives to sell all that we have, to surrender all that we have, that we may find him the sweetness of our joy, the calmness of our peace, the fulness of our blessedness, him of whom we can say, that "He is indeed precious."

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART VIII.

THE GOSPEL NET.

ST. MATTHEW, xiii., v. 47 to 50.—"*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just; and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*"

This parable, like that of the tares and the wheat, teaches us the mixed condition of the Christian Church. They differ however in very important particulars. In that parable, the tares were sown while men slept; in this the fishermen had no choice, their net must gather in whatever came within its reach. That parable teaches the corruption of man by false principles; this one teaches that men are gathered into the church just as they are. Each being intended to teach only the point of comparison, both omit many equally important truths. The parable of the tares does not suggest the idea that a bad man may become a good one: in like manner this parable does not suggest any change in "the fish" after they are taken into the net. We have, therefore, to consider this and other doctrines as not being touched upon

in this parable. It would be evidently a great error to take the parables as evidence on either side of debated matters of which they do not treat, for example, we learn from other parts of scripture that all men, all good men, have once been bad, and that all bad men may become good if they choose. In the 2nd chap. of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle, speaking of those who are redeemed by grace, and will finally be crowned with glory, says in the 3rd verse, "they were by nature the children of wrath even as others;" and in the 1st chap. of the book of Proverbs, from the 20th to the 23rd verse, we find it said of those who shall be finally condemned, that the Holy Spirit speaks to them and says "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates; in the city she uttereth her words saying, how long ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning; and fools hate knowledge? turn you at my reproof; behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." Now here are two most important doctrines, which are not contained in these two most instructive parables, and which on the other hand would seem to be contradicted by them, if we were to apply any other principle of interpretation to the parables than this, that they teach the point of comparison. Our blessed Saviour expounds the leading idea of this parable when he says to his disciples "follow me and I will make you fishers of men." The parable, therefore, teaches us the appointment of a ministry to gather men into the Christian Church, and the two great parties of such in gathering, are those who finally will be found just; and bad men who have their place tem-

porarily in the kingdom of heaven, but whose end is the furnace of fire.

Let us now consider this parable as teaching us:—

I. How men are to be gathered into the Church.

II. What the final discrimination will be.

III, and lastly. The application of these two principles to our present conduct.

Dear brethren, these are awful words of our blessed Redeemer, "The angels shall sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire." They are words that perhaps are applicable to some souls here present; they are words that express the danger of every soul born into this world. Let us hear them with a solemnized heart, let us hear them with prayerful spirits, that if it be indeed the case, that a bad man may become good, by the power of that Spirit; that the offered grace of God's Spirit is given to every human being, we may have the transforming power of that grace amongst us, not only enlightening the eyes of our understanding, but renewing the affections of our hearts, and enabling us to receive the truth in the love of it, and to bring forth fruit to our own eternal blessedness and glory.

I. We have first then to consider how men are to be gathered into the Church: they are to be so gathered *extraordinarily* by means of missionary preaching, and *ordinarily* by means of infant baptism. These are the two appointed means which Christ himself has given and which we may compare to the net that gathers fish of every kind. In both of these cases the bringing into the church is indiscriminate. The scriptures give us no warrant for searching into the state of those who are admitted to the hearing of the preached Gospel, and may

be drawn into the church, or of those who are admitted by infant baptism to membership in the Church of Christ. Indeed, the indiscriminate character is that especially which our Lord teaches us in the parable, he declares that the net gathered of every kind; all the fish that came in the way of the net were alike gathered within its folds; were alike kept within its folds; and were alike drawn to the shore. The leading purpose of the parable is to teach us indiscriminateness until that fearful time of discrimination come, when "the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Now if we come to look at the actual gathering of the Church, as set before us in the Scripture, we shall find this principle of indiscriminateness acted upon everywhere. Upon the day of Pentecost, when the promised effusion of the Spirit came down, and the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, rested upon the waiting disciples of Christ, St. Peter preached to men whose hands were still red with the Saviour's blood, whose consciences were still uncleansed from the guilt of that awful crime; he preached to them all alike, and when they enquired of him "what shall we do?" Peter spake to them all alike: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." He calls upon them for individual repentance, he calls upon them for individual submission to baptism; he promised to each one of them individually, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and when three thousand men stood forward and presented themselves for baptism there was no discrimination made between one and another; they were all alike admitted by that gospel net into the kingdom of

heaven. We read in the 41st verse of the same (2nd) chap. of the Acts of Apostles, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Now lest we should suppose that this word gladly means of necessity conversion of heart, we have the very same idea given to us by our blessed Saviour in the 13th verse of the 8th chap. of St. Luke's Gospel, where he himself declares that it is not conversion of heart, that is, *not necessarily.* "They on the rock are they which when they hear, receive the word with *joy;* and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." Indeed the subsequent history of the Jewish Church but too plainly shows us that this indiscriminate reception of three thousand souls; this glad reception by them all of the word of God, was not the renewal of heart of those men. We see plainly upon the face of the narrative, that there was no discrimination of character, no test to which they were put; but simply this, the gospel was preached, they came forward and declared their readiness to be baptized, they were received, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. Let us come to another case,—that of the eunuch, in the 37th verse of the 8th chap. of the same book of Acts. When the eunuch said, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Individually he required that confession from him. But do we read of any test of the sincerity of that confession?—of any length of time that the eunuch was put under a process of probation? No such thing. At that moment they went down both together into the

water. Philip baptized, and so admitted him into the kingdom of heaven. If we turn again to the same book of Acts, we shall find in the 16th chap., two cases in which two households were admitted into the church; admitted the very day on which they made their profession of faith. We read in the 15th verse, "And when she (Lydia) was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, if ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there." In the 31st verse we read of the jailor of Philippi, that when he made his profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, he was that very night received. And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." "And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." I need not multiply examples, therefore, of the importance of this principle laid down by our blessed Saviour in this parable, that he intended the Gospel net to gather of every kind who should remain so gathered together until the last day, when the day of separation should come. The neglect of this principle led to very serious evils in the early Church. There was that unscriptural principle of catechumens,—men were kept for a long space of time under catechetical instruction before they were baptized, exactly contrary to the principle laid down here. They were permitted to meet in the assemblies of the Christian Church. They were a sort of men, if I may so say, half-way Christians; not heathens, for they were going to public worship, not Christians, for they were not baptized. We read of no such separate body in the Scriptures. The evils that sprang from the system were very great. There was the first general council of Nice, called together by an un-

baptized, nominal Christian, the Emperor Constantine, a man who remained until very near his death an unbaptized believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. To such an extent did this evil prevail, that many of the writings of the primitive fathers are directed against the danger and sin of men putting off their baptism too late. They were forgetful that they themselves, *by a mistaken view of what Christ intended his Church to be, were the cause of that very danger and sin in which men lived.* Had they taken a right view of this parable of the Gospel net gathering of every kind, they would have avoided many corruptions that overspread the social system of the Christian Church. And now, in modern days, we have the same error prevailing to too great an extent. We often find in the accounts that come home from our missionary stations, that men have been kept under probation for a long time; and Christian missionaries think themselves peculiarly faithful in their ministrations, in delaying the baptism of men who have acknowledged their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have amongst ourselves baptists, who will deny to children the rite of baptism, and deny to the adult the rite of baptism, until they believe that such adult is a converted man. They will acknowledge him to be, in the popular sense, a believer in Christ; and until they have searched his heart, and seen whether in the judgment of sinful, erring, fallible men, that he is become a converted man, they will not administer to him Christian baptism. How does such a course consist with what our Saviour says here? "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that is cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind." We have a gross mistake made about infant baptism; we have unscriptural views of infant baptism; as if Christ had made

some special promise of efficacious baptism to the infants of those who, in unscriptural limitation, are called believing parents,—for the word believer is nowhere in Scripture limited to a converted person. Christ speaks in that passage which I have quoted from St. Luke of some who for awhile believed, but had no root in themselves; and all the human distinctions that have been drawn in modern days about the children of believing parents, and the children of unconverted parents; and the baptism given to one being so much more efficacious than the baptism given to the other, are equally contrary to what our blessed Saviour says here, "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind." God forbid that I should speak one word in this place against the power of faith, or in the least degree throw discredit upon that precious promise given to faith: "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" That there are indeed great and precious promises given to our faith is a most important and comforting truth; but that there are especial distinctions drawn in Scripture between one baptism and another is altogether an error. It is not against the power of faith, God forbid it, that I should direct these observations, but against that which is not to be found in the Scripture, and which is contrary to the teaching of Christ, and which produces amongst us many and serious evils. We have, therefore, presented to us in the Scriptures two great instruments, which our Saviour alludes to in this parable, for gathering men into the Church of Christ: evangelizing the heathen by preaching, and the baptism of the infants of Christian parents. Here, then, we have the state of the kingdom of heaven as presented to us in this parable; an in-

discriminate collection of all those who are gathered in by preaching, or received by baptism into the universal Church of Christ.

II. Let us consider the final discrimination. "When the net was full they drew it to shore, and sat down: they gathered the good into vessels, and cast the bad away: so shall it be at the end of the world." Here we have indeed the discrimination, here we have the time of holiness on one side, and of unholiness on the other. Now we are in the evening tide—the light and the darkness meeting together,—now we have the twilight,—then we shall have the morning time, when the Sun of righteousness shall have arisen with healing in his wings. Then the darkness shall have, for ever, past away; and the sons of darkness shall be, for ever, separated from the children of light. "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

In this second view of the kingdom of heaven, we find our full answer to those who would represent it, as if we were careless about sin; as if we were mingling up together the bad and the good in one indiscriminate view, by representing the state of the Christian Church as an indiscriminate mixture of the bad and the good together. It is, indeed, a mixture of the bad and the good together, but it is a most merciful mixture; it is a mixture purchased for the whole by the blood of Him who died for all, "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again." It is an admission of the fallen, the guilty, the corrupt, the sin-defiled into the company of

Christ's people, that they might become instead of the corrupt the uncorrupt, instead of being unholy that they might have the holiness that God gives, instead of being the bad that they may be brought to be amongst the good, that they may by the power of Divine grace be transformed from the children of the devil into children of God, and made heirs of God, and partakers of everlasting blessedness and glory. It was for this purpose that Christ revealed to us the awful and yet encouraging truths of this parable; that the separation is not to be now, but that it is to be at the end; that we are not to separate ourselves from the Church of Christ or from the ordinances of Christ now, because our consciences accuse us of sin, or because our feelings betray our heart's corruption; that these are no reasons for separating ourselves from the Christian Church, or from its holy ordinances; for, if the Gospel net contained the bad and the good together in one communion,—one association,—so shall the kingdom of heaven. Its benefits are open to all, its mercies are free to all, its Saviour died for all, its Spirit pleads with all. The voice is this: Why will ye die? Turn you, turn you; for as I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye. If he thus speaks to us of present intermingling, and of no present separation, his voice indeed awfully speaks to us of a final separation, when the angels of God shall separate the wicked from the just. It speaks to the careless, thoughtless sinner, and says to him, art thou not a partaker of present privileges? art thou not a recipient of present grace and mercy? has not the Saviour died for thee? is not the Spirit pleading with thee? is not the Church thy shelter? are not her ordinances thy means of

grace? why then wilt thou not accept to-day what may not be presented to-morrow? Behold, now is the accepted time, to-morrow may never be given to thee. And thus it speaks of a final separation: it warns all to flee from the wrath to come; encourages all with a certain hope resting upon the unchangeable promises of the God of love, with whom there is indeed mercy and truth to help every child of man, every one who is brought in this indiscriminate net into the kingdom of heaven.

III. And lastly, we have the application of these principles to our present conduct. It teaches us that membership in the kingdom of heaven is not a test of our real character. When we declare in our catechism that we are, by baptism, made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors, that is, partakers of the kingdom of heaven, we are not declaring what is the individual character, but what is the baptismal privilege of all. Here Christ recognizes within the net the bad fishes as well as the good, and so does our catechism recognize them as within the kingdom of heaven, and scripturally recognizes them as, being in that membership, members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. The first application therefore of these two principles is this, that no man is to rely upon his membership in the kingdom of heaven, upon his baptismal privileges as being a test to decide his case at the last; because, if the net gathered them all for final separation, the gathering into the net cannot be the decision of the final award.

In the second place, we may apply the two principles to this truth; that it is a means of privilege. They were gathered into the kingdom of heaven by one or other of these means, or both together: the preaching

of the Gospel or the ordinance of baptism. And now this is the state of grace in which God by his Holy Spirit is dealing in mercy and grace with every member of the kingdom of God We accordingly find it, in the 13th chap. of the Acts of the Apostles, declared to be a state of grace, where the apostle went into the synagogue and preached the Gospel to all the Jews and the Gentiles also who were there, as we read in the 44th verse, "Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." There was the gospel net by means of preaching, drawing them together; and the apostles earnestly exhorted them to continue in the grace of God, to submit to that grace which had thus come to their hearts, and visited them with heavenly teaching. And in the 5th chap. of the Epistle to the Galatians, the same apostle warns them of the danger of falling from that grace, and says, in the 4th verse, "Christ is become of no effect unto you: whosoever of you are justified by the law ye are fallen from grace." And to the same purpose, in the 3rd chap. of the Second Epistle of Peter, where we read in the 15th verse, "Account that the long suffering of our Lord is salvation." It is, therefore, a means of privilege to be drawn within the gospel net. *There* are to be found those dealings of God which he has divinely fitted to make sinful souls fit for the holiness of heaven.

And, thirdly, the application of those two principles is this, that Church discipline is not exclusion from the kingdom of heaven. Christ declared that those who are contained within that net remain within it until they are drawn to shore. And here we have the error of the

Romanist rebuked. He represents excommunication as shutting one out from the kingdom of heaven. It is no such thing. He remains within the net until the last day. We do not deny the exercise of Church discipline by denying the right of exclusion from the kingdom of heaven of any one who has once been admitted into it. If we turn to the 14th and 15th verses of the 3rd chap. of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, we shall find the apostle there saying: "And if any man obey not our word, by this epistle note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Although he may be shut out from our company, although he may not be admitted to the communion of the Church, he is not separated from the kingdom of heaven; he is not separated from his membership in that Church from whose communion he is for a time suspended: "Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." And to the same purpose we have, in the 5th chap. of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle saying that though the power of excommunication is a fearful power, yet it is not one deciding the final state, for he says in the 5th verse, "Deliver such an one unto satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." There is therefore Church discipline and divine discipline within that net, and the indiscriminate character of membership does not in the least degree affect the awful responsibilities resting upon the Church of Christ, and each member of her to beware, "lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled," and of the necessity of putting away the ungodly brother,—the unholy Christian. But how should

the consideration of these two principles lead us to employ with awful earnestness this means of grace? Why is it that men, immortal beings, are for a time brought within that gospel net? Why is it that the Holy Spirit sends his servants to stand in the highways to proclaim to the thoughtless, careless sinner, how long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools in their folly? Why these words? "Turn ye at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you; I will make known my words unto you." Why is it that we are desired to ponder the path of our feet, and to let our eyes look right on. Why is it that the believer in Christ is desired to be very watchful, very careful of the state of his own heart; that he is not to be satisfied merely with having ascertained that he has chosen Christ, but that he is yet exhorted to grow in grace, to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? Why these words, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not the things that we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward?" Why? But because eternity is an awful truth; and because there is a furnace of fire, the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, the torment, the smoke of which ascendeth up for ever and ever, and where they have no rest day nor night because there is the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched. It is because there is a heaven of blessedness, a reality of everlasting glory, a dwelling place that may be the inheritance of the sinner who will forsake his sins. High and holy as it is, it is not too high to be climbed into by the feeble man who rests upon the promise of God,—by him who, feeling his weakness seeks to the strong One for strength, and feeling his corruption, goes to the pure One for holiness. It is for this reason

that our blessed Saviour recals to us here and in other places that truth that there is to be the end of the world, —that there is to be the severance of the wicked from among the just,—that there is to be an everlasting blessedness and an eternity of woe, and that we may be led now, deeply, earnestly, and as in the light of eternity, to consider our present privileges, and to avail ourselves of them as God's appointed means for the attaining of everlasting blessedness and glory. And therefore this parable is like all the teaching of our blessed Saviour, divinely fitted to stir men up with awful earnestness to employ the means of grace, that they may attain to the blessedness of everlasting glory.

Oh, brethren, if men would weigh as they ought that one word eternity; if men would confess as they ought to do the warned danger of everlasting misery; if men heard, as they ought to do, the lips of the merciful Saviour speaking to men and telling them of the danger of everlasting woe, would we not be more earnest; would we not be more prayerful; would we not be found oftener in the chamber where no eye sees us but God's eye; and would we not come to our chamber, bearing with us the impress more deeply than we do,—the impress of holy fellowship with God? Our duties in this respect are privileges, our responsibilities in this respect may be regarded in their personal character that we have, each one of us, to think for ourselves, to act for ourselves, to pray for ourselves, because we must each one give an account of himself to God. And if the teaching of this parable be rightly received by us, it ought indeed to send us deeply into our own hearts, to examine our thoughts, to examine our feelings, to examine our purposes in life, to see that we are ready, ready to meet that severance of

the just from the unjust, which we know not how soon may come to each of us. How should this thought enter into our domestic scene, and make us ask ourselves how are our families regulated, as parents, as children, as masters, as mistresses, as servants, as a household? Are we those who are making use of all the charities of the domestic scene, not only for personal, present, and holy enjoyment, human enjoyment which God has fitted them to be, but for that personal training for the heavenly family of God, which the Spirit of God will enable us to make our household to be? Would it not produce in every family the domestic altar of united prayer, of holy conversation, and of purifying intercourse, making us able to look back upon the past as being day after day thepurifying altars within that sweetness of the domestic scene, the preparation for everlasting blessedness and glory? How would it enter into our social intercourse, if we would look upon society in its every mark, and see whether it was indeed so regulated that our re-unions together in our social intercourse, that wider domestic scene, if I may so call it, would be all so regulated as to make men fit for the blessed side of that severance which is to distinguish the just from the unjust,—him that served God from him that served him not? Oh, how would it affect men's congregational character as those who meet together as one body in Christ? How would the thought of eternity, of that final separation, affect our hearts and minds? How would it enter into our prayers, change our mere words into petitions, and animate our spirits with the quickened life of God's Spirit? How would it make *men* earnest in hearing the preaching, and the *minister* earnest in waiting upon the

Spirit of God, that he might not speak in the words of man's wisdom, but with those which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual? How would it affect our feelings in the sacraments that Christ has appointed in his Church? Would our baptisms be performed as they now are; performed in private, none caring to be present at them but those who are most interested in the infant? And should we not find them rather to be a precious exercise of discipline in the Church of Christ, in which the congregation would gladly spend so much additional time in earnest prayer, that that new addition to the kingdom of heaven, that new inclusion within the gospel net, might be, in time, full of grace, and in eternity, full of glory? And how would it draw our souls to the Holy Communion? If men felt that they were drawn into the net for the very purpose of being, while in that net, prepared by the divinely appointed means for the divinely prepared glory, think you that men would dare to be absent from that holy table? Think you that sin would keep them away from Him that died for sinners? Think you that the troubles of a burdened heart would be an excuse for remaining from the Saviour that said, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?" Think you that men indeed realizing that at that holy table Christ was present, that that cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ, and that that bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ, that there the Saviour comes to us, and that there we come to the Saviour; if that truth were felt in the light of eternity, felt in the power of the Spirit, would men dare to be absent, when they have the means

of coming to that which is fitted to be the strengthening and refreshing of the soul, as the body is by the bread and wine?

Oh, let it be our prayer to God that we would more earnestly consider, more fervently pray, more diligently watch, and more anxiously live in the light of the eternal world.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART IX.

THE HOUSEHOLDER.

ST. MATTHEW xiii. 52.—"*Then said he unto them: Therefore, every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*"

There are two great principles by which human beings are governed and guided,—authority and instruction. Let us look at a human being as he enters into this world,—a helpless infant; in no degree above the other animal creation around him; more dependent than almost any other animal being,—*incapable of observation, incapable of reflection, incapable of thought;*—he is entirely dependent on the care of others; and as he progresses through the helpless years of infancy, God has made him depend altogether upon authority. As he begins to observe, we see that he is necessarily confiding, trusting to every word that everybody around says to him. As he begins to think, he is but little able to reason; he receives the statements made to him upon authority; gradually, as his faculties begin to develope, he begins to think for himself; he begins to find, that unprincipled persons around him but too often speak falsely to him, laughing at the simplicity of children, in being foolish enough to believe the corrupted folly of

more adult age. By degrees the principle of authority becomes less and less the guiding principle with him, and the principle of instruction becomes more and more that by which he is to govern and to guide himself. Yet the principle of authority never ceases, although it diminishes. The principle of instruction, if he be a wise man, is always increasing, but inasmuch as no one can know all things, we must for those things that we do not know depend upon the testimony of others. And here God has taught us a great lesson from the natural world around us, that we are never altogether to shake off the principle of authority—that is, simply believing on trust; although we are always, if we rightly use the faculties that God has given us, to be increasing in the principle of well-instructed knowledge.

Now the same thing is true in religion. God has made the child dependent for religion upon his teachers. His very first ideas of God are not by his own reflection. If he have parents, who are what parents ought to be, his opening thoughts are filled with the idea of God. Upon authority, not reflection, he receives the testimony of his parents, that there is a Great Being, who is ever present, ever watchful, ever caring for the creatures of his hands. As soon as he has imbibed this idea of God, if he have Christian parents, so soon as he has committed transgressions, and so can understand the faults that he has committed against his parents, these parents will teach him the redeeming love of God. He receives the doctrine not from any speculation about the necessity of a Divine government, not from any philosophical view of the need of an atonement, but because, having felt that he has committed a fault, he is prepared to understand the nature of pardon; and from his parents'

forgiveness he is fitted to learn, not upon reason but authority, the parental forgiveness of Him who gave his Son to die for our sins. Thus we find that in religion, as in the natural world around us, God has made the principle of authority — that is, receiving doctrine upon trust — the foundation of all our true religion. And as in the natural world, so is it in the spiritual world: the child is not to be always a child in spiritual things, any more than in natural things. Do we not find St. John distinguishing the Christian Church into "little children," "young men," and "fathers"? Do we not find St. Peter speaking of those who are but as "new born babes, desiring the sincere milk of the word"? Do we not find St. Paul telling us, that those are but babes who have need of milk; that those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern good and evil, they are such as are capable of receiving strong meat, that food which belongeth to them that are full of age? Thus we see in the growth of spiritual life the principle of authority becoming, humanly speaking, less and less, the principle of instruction becoming more and more. There is this great difference between authority in religion and authority in common things: that in religion there is a twofold authority,—the authority of man and the authority of God. It is the authority of man which diminishes, the authority of God abides ever the same. The wisest philosopher, as well as the youngest child, are both demanded of God to put implicit credence in him. When the Divine command came forth to Abraham to do an apparently ungodly action; to lift an apparently unnatural arm against the life of his own son; no disputing could be permitted against the Divine command: Abraham must undisputingly obey the authority

of God, and say, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" If the same command came from a human being, Abraham would have committed a sin in yielding such obedience to man. Now God has provided, in the carrying out of this twofold principle in his Church, the inspired prophet and the uninspired teacher. The inspired prophet is one who comes to us with a message from God, attested so as to be credible to us; in order the more fully to make us feel that it is from God. The inspired prophet is not always permitted to know the meaning of his own message. We read that they stood as learners at the feet of their own words; for unto them it was revealed, that not unto them, but unto us, did they minister the things that were spoken by them. They, like us, had to search what things and what manner of times they thus spoke of. By not being permitted to understand their own predictions, God taught this important lesson to his Church, that the inspired prophet was not the understanding teacher, but the one who got the message from God to deliver, not in man's words but in God's words, to his people, who were to be instructed. There is a lower degree of that inspiration ever abiding in the Church; that knowledge of the word of God, that does not come alone from human searching, but that is the suggestion of the Divine Spirit bringing light upon God's holy word, which distinguishes individuals in God's Church, and has distinguished such individuals from age to age; to whom God has given a clearer insight into his written word, and enabled them to see what comes to them as they experience it themselves, not by the labour of the human understanding, but by the unexpected inflowing of Divine knowledge, There-

fore the apostle says, in the 4th chapter of Ephesians we read, that one of the perpetual gifts of Christ to his Church is the prophet, as well as the pastor and the teacher. The ordinary instruction given us in the Church is that of the teacher, the man who studies the Bible, and under the enlightening grace of the Spirit of God learns the truth of the gospel of God. From being taught himself he is able to teach others. Christ fulfilled this office to his Church. We find that he was not only a prophet but a teacher; a man who took the Bible in his hands, and went over it chapter by chapter and verse by verse, explaining it to his hearers, as you will find in the 24th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, and the 27th verse; where, even after his resurrection, Jesus was still a teacher, explaining the Scriptures to his people: "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Thus we have Jesus a teacher as well as Jesus a prophet. And so we find St. Paul declaring of his own teaching in the 4th chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, and the 2nd verse: "We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Here was reasoning instruction, that reached the conscience, because it was manifestly true.

Now in the parable our Lord speaks of the teacher, not of the prophet; it is the instructed scribe, or rather, as the word more frequently means, the scribe that is a disciple of the kingdom of heaven. "Then said he unto them: Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an

householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." From our text, therefore, let us consider,

I. The immediate application of these words;

II. Their application to our own times.

1. Then the immediate application of these words. We have here the scribe, not the priest, — not the prophet, but the scribe, — the man whose office it was to copy and to multiply copies of the Scriptures, and who, being thus engaged upon the copying of the Scriptures, became professionally engaged in explaining the Scriptures. He is the scribe and the disciple of the kingdom of heaven; therefore he was one who was searching the Scriptures, with respect to that coming kingdom which had been predicted in those Scriptures, which it was his office to copy and to explain. He was one who looked forward to that kingdom; and therefore Christ speaks of him as a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, or one who made himself a disciple of the kingdom of heaven. He was a scribe who had a treasure: he brings "forth out of his treasure things new and old." Now what was the treasure of the Jewish scribe? It was not the temple: he had no right there by his office. It was not the synagogue: for he was not necessarily a teaching priest. It was his Bible. This was that of which they were the expounders. Therefore his treasure was God's holy word, as we find it declared to be in the 19th Psalm, and the 10th verse: "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold." Here was his treasure; that which was provided for him by the great Head, and Husband, and Teacher of his Church; that treasure which we find thus described in the Song of Solomon, in the last verse of the 7th chapter: "At

our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved!" Here, then, is the character of that scribe. He was one who was a disciple of the kingdom of heaven, one who had a treasure—the Scriptures; and who brought forth out of that treasure, in his discipleship to the kingdom of heaven, things new and old. It had reference, therefore, in those days, to all the new principles and the old truths which the well-instructed scribes would bring forth to the people of God. Jesus opened the understanding of those scribes, that they might understand the Scriptures. Jesus was the first of those teaching scribes, when, beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded to them out of the Scriptures the things concerning himself. The things that were old were not cast away, because there were new things brought in. The things that were new did not contradict that which was old. The combination of the one with the other gave that perfect development of Divine light which the Christian dispensation brought in. The apostle, a well-instructed scribe unto the kingdom of heaven, declared that he did not come to teach new principles, but the application of old principles in a new light; that he was declaring none other things than what Moses and the Prophets in the law taught was to come. Our blessed Saviour, by joining things old with things new, reminded his disciples that he did not come to destroy the law or the prophets. By joining things new with things old, he suggested to them, that there was to be an increased knowledge and an increased light; and yet, by these new things, as well as the old things, being found in the scribe's treasury, he reminded them that God had already revealed them, though men had not yet seen them.

Now, if we look at the New Testament as an explanation of the Old, we shall find this remarkable fact, that there is not one doctrine in the New Testament that is not in the Old; but it is not seen in the same clearness in the Old as in the New Testament. We shall fail to discover a single doctrine in the New Testament that is not in the Old. God revealed it in the Old Testament, but men did not see it there. Just like the householder bringing out to his guest something new: it was in his house that he found these new things: these things were in the house, but the guest did not see them until the master of the house brought them forth. Though it was new to the guest, it was not new to him. Now what is the leading principle of the Christian religion? Is it not the character and office of Jesus of Nazareth, that in the person of one man—Jesus of Nazareth—concentrated all the revelation that is given in the Old Testament? He is the prophet,—he is the priest,—he is the king. These three offices were known in the Old Testament times, but they were not combined in one man. The Jews looked forward to a prophet like unto Moses; but they did not know that that prophet was to die for their sins. The Jews looked for a messiah like unto the son of David: they expected him to reign in glory; but they did not know that that Messiah was first to suffer for sins. The Jews looked for a priest who was to exercise the priestly function in the renewed temple; but they did not know that that Priest was to be the King upon the throne; one who was to be the great High Priest of the everlasting temple, and one who would unite in himself the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. Now we clearly see that these three offices were in the Old Testament, but they did not see

them: although they were revealed truths, they were unknown truths. The New Testament brings light upon that point for us. We see them; and we, now, under the teaching of the scribe, the disciple of the kingdom of heaven, are able to discern things new as well as old in that heavenly treasure. Yet in all that treasure there was no contradiction between what was new and what was old. There were, indeed, the corruptions of false doctrine; but these were not found in the treasure, they were the traditions of men. Christ, when he was speaking of the scribe's treasure-house, was not speaking of the corrupted traditions of the church,—he was not speaking of the commandments of men, that made void the commandments of God. Of these he said, "Every plant that my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." It was only of that which was found in the treasury that he spake. He "bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

And this brings us,

2. To the application of the same words to our own time. The gradual development of knowledge is the condition of perfect humanity. If Adam in heaven now knew no more than he knew six thousand years ago, he would have spent his time in heaven to very little purpose. If his love were no warmer now than it was six thousand years ago, he would have dwelt in the presence of the Divine love to very little purpose. Here, then, we see, in reflecting upon it, that even in heaven a gradual development is that which belongs to the perfection of created nature. There is but one Being who cannot be developed,—that Being that contains in himself, at one moment and at all times, in his eternity, all things. The excellence of the creature consists in his capacity

for gradual development. Now, it is to this rule that our Saviour tacitly refers, when he speaks here of the instructed scribe bringing out of his treasure things new and old. He gives us an excellent rule for safety in receiving new things; and it is not without a purpose that he joins here these two words—things new and things old—that the well-instructed scribe does not by his new things deny the old things. Rather does he throw greater light and clearness upon them, and the things that are new make him to believe more firmly, and hold more lovingly, the old things which had been committed to him: "The faith once delivered to the saints." How clearly may we exemplify this in human science. The child begins with the first rules of arithmetic, and he is taught in his childish mind to take in so much of the science of numbers as his little faculties are able to receive. He goes on, with his knowledge expanding, in his scientific acquirements. He rises up to the higher calculus and to those more refined inventions in human science which enable him very much to dispense with many of the more clumsy forms of knowledge that he had in his childish hours. Does he discover this earlier teaching to be untrue? Does he not rather discover new truths in them? When the man of profound mathematical powers discovers new elements of mathematical skill, he does not despise, but rather sees greater beauty and more powerful combinations in those simpler numbers which he learned as a child; and, although on many occasions he may be able to dispense with their use, he never does other than reverence them as deeply true. Now so is it in religion: the veriest child must receive upon authority the outline of the doctrines of the Christian faith. He receives them, and exercises

a childish mind upon them; yet, as he advances in the Divine life—as he is able to speculate more upon the Divine dealings—as he can reason upon the principles of the Divine actions—he becomes the Christian philosopher, who not only embraces those principles for his soul's salvation, but who dwells upon them for his mind's instruction. He reads those parts of Scripture that brought to his childish mind the power of faith, the brightness of hope, and the warmth of love; yet, as he advances and expands in knowledge, he is able to see in the same parts of Scripture new truths that he had not seen before, new beauties which he had not admired before,—his mind is instructed as well as his heart taught. The Christian philosopher, in matters of faith, is still a Christian child; yet, in matters of intellect, he is an expanded man, one who, through reason and use, has his senses exercised to discern both good and evil. We may take a very striking example of this from the 40th chapter of the Prophet Isaiah. There we have the greatness, the majesty, and the power of God brought before our minds, and in such language as a child can understand, and yet in such truth as that the philosopher may, for ages to come, exercise his thoughts upon the objects that are given to us there, even in human science, by Divine wisdom. In the 12th verse he says: "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" Is there any child who is able to read, too young to learn from this verse to reverence the greatness, to think of the majesty, and to trust in the power of God? And yet it is only as the expanded light of

science enables us to see deeper into the meaning of this, that the Christian philosopher can discover that while it does indeed set before him, as it does before the child, God in his greatness, it teaches him what it does not teach the little child—science in its depths. He can learn from it, that when God disposed the waters of this world's surface he measured the waters, otherwise this world could not exist. If there were not a proportionate measure between the land and the water, it would either, for want of rain, if there were too much land, become an arid desert; or from too much rain, if there were too much water, become a useless marsh, unfit for human habitation. Thus the reason of the philosopher, the Christian philosopher, can see that the prophet was speaking a deeper truth than he himself knew, when he asked, "Who hath measured the water in the hollow of his hand? who hath meted out heaven with the span?" It is only, brethren, in our days that the light of astronomical knowledge has enabled us to see what not the prophet but God saw in this simple word: "Who hath meted out heaven with the span?" It is the increased light of human science that has taught us that God has measured out the heavens with the span; that all those stars which attract by their beauty the admiration of the child, and exercise in their movements the skill of the astronomer, each one has assigned to it its place: it is measured and placed by the span of that mighty hand which can alone mete out heaven, and who hath comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure. Do we not learn from human science, that if there were not the due proportion of plain, and rock, and dusty land, there could not flow from the mountain the stream that waters the earth, and

there could not be from the dust of the earth the arable land to provide food for man? "Who hath comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure," and assigned to each its relative proportion? "Who hath weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance," disposing the relative densities of our globe in such a way as to make it move evenly on its own axis? And thus does God's word agree with the increased light of science. The scribe that is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is enabled, by that heavenly light, to bring out of his blessed treasure-house — the inspired word — things new to cast their light upon things old; not to diminish our faith in that which as a child we learned, but to enable us to see in it a lesson which as a child we could not see. Now, in our present day, the principle that our Lord gives us here is of deep value to us. We have two great parties into which humanity has been always divided: those who would rest upon authority, and those who would, in self-will, cast away all authority, and rest upon themselves. We have this exemplified to us in the professing Church of Christ: on one side by the Roman Catholic, and on the other by the Socinian. The Roman Catholic will come to us, telling us you must take religion entirely on authority; you are not to exercise your mind; you must believe what the church gives you. The Unitarian would tell us, you are to take nothing on authority; you are to be the philosopher only, taking the Scriptures according to your own judgment and understanding, nothing else. Here are the two extremes. The Church of England takes both these principles. She says, that although we can never cast off the principle of authority, we must always be increasing in the principle of instruction. She speaks

to her children with the voice of authority, when she delivers to them that creed which she declares, "Except a man do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly;" while she speaks with the language of instruction, "We speak as to wise men, judge ye what we say;" while she tells her children, that the three creeds of the Church are to be received by us, "Because they may be proved by the most certain warrants of holy Scripture." Now it could not be, brethren, but that in the increased instruction, in the increased knowledge that has pervaded all classes of society at this time, that we should be peculiarly exposed to the danger of losing what is old by the great attraction of gaining so much that is new; and feeling how much more we know than did our fathers, we are very much in danger of thinking that therefore we are wiser than our fathers were, as if knowledge were wisdom. Do we find that the man who can search deeply into human science is a wise man? Do we find that talent is always joined with common sense? Do we find that genius is the safest and the wisest thing with which to go into the world? A man may know very little, and yet be a wise man; a man may know a great deal, and yet be a foolish man. There has been, perhaps, no age of this world's history in which this was more needful to be known, and therefore no age of this world's history in which our blessed Saviour's rule was more important to us. If a novelty come to us, let us remember, that things new must agree with things old in religion. The Christian Church has not in the nineteenth century to learn the leading features of the Christian religion. Let us take those things upon which Christian churches are concordant, and we shall find

them all true, if the Bible be true. Let us take the united testimony of the different parts of the Christian Church, and we shall find that they do not unite in a single error. Take the Church as the Scriptures present it to us; the visible Church, as that which came down in one uninterrupted succession from the apostles. Ask the whole Christian Church what are the Christian Scriptures, and they will tell us this New Testament. Whether we demand it from the Roman Catholic, or from the Greek, or from the Armenian, or from the Anglican, all unite with one voice,—The books which the Church of England acknowledges to be the New Testament are the Christian Scriptures, and none other. Ask the Jew, to whom was committed the oracles of God in olden times, what are the Old Testament Scriptures? and he answers to us, with a voice responded to by our own Church, that which the Church of England acknowledges to be the Old Testament Scriptures are the books of God committed to our keeping. Here, therefore, we have a united testimony, without the least shadow of difference, upon that important question,—What is the word of God? Let us go again to all those churches that have come down from the apostles' times; let us ask them, How many Gods are there? But one answer will come from all,—One. Let us ask them, What is the nature of that God? And they will tell us he is a complex being, three persons in one God. No discordant note shall be heard from the separate testimony, and from the united testimony of all the apostolically descended churches that at present exist Ask them, Which is the most profitable method of prayer? And they will all, by their practice, tell us that a form of sound words is the best method of public

prayer. Ask them, How many sacraments has Christ established in his Church? Is not the united testimony this, that there are two, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord? Wherever we find an error held by some church, we shall find that the united Church of Christ is not accordant upon that error. Here, then, are the confessedly old things that have come down to us from the apostles' times. Is there an apostolically descended church that denies that the Son of God died for man's sins? that the Spirit of God sanctifies men's souls? that the power of God will raise the dust of death into the brightness and the blessedness of the resurrection of the body, and bestow upon it everlasting life? No: there is but one voice from the whole Church upon this subject. Here are the old things that are contained in this blessed treasure-house, God's holy word. Now let us apply this rule to the novelties of Romanism. Can we find the adoration of the host in the New Testament? Can we find prayer to dead men in the New Testament? Can any Roman scribe find in his treasure-house, God's word, that the blessed Virgin receives the adoration of cherubim and seraphim and of the host of heaven? Nay, he himself acknowledges, that it is not in this treasure; he is obliged to go for it to the expedient of human tradition, and therefore condemns himself by his admission that many of his doctrines are outside the word of God. But what Christ directs our attention to here, as a well-instructed scribe, was this: he must bring the things out of his treasure, so that what is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be received by any man as an article of faith. And further, as we must expect in the development of Christian doctrine new opinions, new views of Divine truths, how important it is to apply

the same rule? If the new thing be a true thing, it will not contradict the faith once delivered to the saints. Take for example, the expectation of Christ's reign on earth. We believe that to be revealed in holy Scripture. Our immediate fathers did not believe it. They looked for the spiritual reign, as they called it, of Christ. Now the new doctrine does not deny the old: it is not a new doctrine, but it became new because it was a forgotten doctrine. But do we doubt the spiritual reign of Christ because we believe the personal reign of Christ? No such thing. Those who look for Christ to come in glory to reign and rule before his ancients gloriously in Jerusalem, do they deny that Christ will reign in spirit and in power? Do they deny the old faith of the saints, that he will diffuse the knowledge of the Lord through the world, and fill this earth with holiness? Far from it. They look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, as their fathers did. And if our time permitted it, I might go through all the new things that have been brought into the Christian Church,—that have forced their entrance into the Christian Church, and challenged and obtained the homage of thinking men,—that they have not contradicted, in any one instance, the old faith once delivered to the saints. Many a doctrine has been pressed upon us that could not be brought from the word of God. It has stood for awhile; but has been found to be a plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted, and it is now sought for in vain. Let us bear in mind, then, this rule of our blessed Saviour,—the two-fold testimony,—things new agreeing with things old. Our Lord himself says that the testimony of two men is true, that is, they are credible witnesses; and you will find it to be, indeed, a

very safe test to which to bring every new truth presented to your mind. Is it to be found in this treasure? And does it agree with that which God has already taught you by his Spirit? If it do, it is true; if it do not, it is false: reject it. Now this parable especially sets before our thoughts the need of instruction in God's holy word; and, brethren, it is my duty this day to bring before you the thought of Christian instruction. Our Schools in this place need your help. We have, including the Ragged School, over five hundred children under instruction, and these children with the Bible in their hands. It is only a fortnight since I appealed to your liberality for the diffusion of the Gospel through our Colonies. Is it too soon to come before you again, to ask something for own people at home? Is there one heart here that can say these poor little children ought not to be pleaded for this morning? That our minister brings these cases too often before us? Brethren, if it came every Sunday in the year, it would only be in accordance with what this treasure-house of the well-instructed scribe reminds us of: "Now, concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye: Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gathering, when I come." We shall not attain to the scriptural model until we have our weekly collection as a thank-offering to God, and in this place; and the sooner we return to that which is prescribed by our own Church, to that which is enjoined in this treasure-house of the well-instructed scribe in the kingdom of heaven, the sooner shall we bring down a blessing upon our own souls and upon our families. It may not be unsuitable on this occasion to remind you of

the alms-chest at the door. The amount collected there is larger than many persons expected would have been received, because of what we know of the existing state of society, and of the existing feeling amongst professing Christians; but the sum collected there does not amount to one farthing each time from the worshippers that come to this house of prayer. Ought these things so to be? Are the objects contemplated by the appeals to your benevolence, are they the voice of Christ or are they the voice of men? Is the instruction of children in this place Christ's trust committed to us? Is the sending the Gospel to our Colonies Christ's trust? Are the objects contemplated in these appeals capricious objects? Or are they the voice of His providence, who hath said, "The poor shall never cease out of the land?" No! they are the goodness of God, giving us an opportunity of doing that which we cannot do in heaven; and that is, to stretch out the hand of Christian almsgiving, to cheer the heart of human want and woe. I feel that I shall not appeal to you in vain this morning, although it is so recently that I have already appealed. When I ask you in Christ's name to give us help this morning, according as God hath prospered you, to bring up children instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, out of this blessed treasure-house, whose truths are "more precious than gold, yea, than much fine gold."

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART X.

THE LOST SHEEP.

ST. MATTHEW, xviii., v. 12 to 14.—"*How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so, it is not the will of your Father, which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*"

The distinctions which the necessities of the social world require us to draw between various shades of character in the world, all vanish into nothing when we compare man with God. There are, indeed, various degrees of moral distinctions, when we compare man with man. The wisdom of God says to us, "Enter not into the way of the wicked. Avoid it, pass not by it, come away." And yet, all these vanish into nothing when we bring the whole world into the presence of a holy God. There the same Spirit of God tells us there is no difference: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; for we know that what things

soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." It was from not entering deeply into this character of our fallen humanity, that the people were so little able to understand the character of our blessed Redeemer. Had they been more in the habit of comparing the state of their own hearts, with the conceptions of good which God would have taught them in their consciences; had they been more in the habit of comparing themselves with the holiness of God, we should not have had the surprise felt, much less expressed, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them;" we should not have the pharisee standing and thanking God for his goodness, and despising the publican at his side. It was to teach us this blessed truth that our Lord, on two occasions, gave us the parable which forms the subject of our consideration this morning. Here he was speaking to his disciples, to make them think of the value of souls; but in the 15th chapter of St. Luke he is speaking to the pharisees and scribes, to explain his truth. In this chapter he saith to the disciples, "Take heed, that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father, which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which is lost." Here he speaks of the inestimable value of a human soul; of a little one that believes in him; that in heaven their angels stand in the presence of God; that on earth the Son of man came from heaven to save them from their lost and ruined condition. Here, therefore, we have that thought, the inestimable value of a human soul, and the boundless mercy of God towards a lost soul. If we turn to the 15th chapter of

the Gospel of St. Luke, we find the same parable given to us, but in a different connection. The publicans and sinners drew near to him; the scribes and pharisees murmured to see our blessed Saviour speaking to publicans and sinners; Christ repeats the parable to them. If any one of them had a hundred sheep, and one sheep had gone into the wilderness, strayed away from its master's fold, become a wanderer, diseased, unfit in its then condition for anything, would not one of them go after that sheep and bring it back, and rejoice over it? And shall not God look upon his wandering sheep, and devise means whereby his wandering one may be brought back to his gracious fold? So there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Here we have the motives of our blessed Saviour's conduct explained to us, as in this chapter we have the inestimable value of souls brought to our thoughts, both teaching us the purpose of Christ's coming from heaven to this world, the Son of man is come to save the lost. From this, therefore, let us consider,

I. The parable;

II. Its application.

The parable is very simple. A shepherd who owns a hundred sheep loses one. The shepherd leaves the ninety and nine, not in a desolate wilderness, but in a wilderness without human habitations. Pastures are found there, in which sheep can feed. He leaves them, and seeks the lost one. He remains seeking until he finds it. He finds it, but it is unable to walk back with him. He brings it on his shoulders, (or as the Greek word expresses it, on his *own* shoulders,) rejoicing. Whe

brings it to his home, his father's home, those who are the inhabitants of that dwelling-place rejoice with him. There is joy among the friends of that shepherd, because of the recovered sheep that was lost.

If, then, we turn from the parable to the application, it brings before our thoughts the great flock. What was the great flock spoken of here? Some would look upon it as men, and that a few sinners were the wandering sheep to be brought back to the human fold. It will not for a moment bear that comparison. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The ninety and nine just men, that need no repentance, could not be found. The lost thing was not some men, but all men. So was this lost and ruined world. The great flock is that which the apostle calls the family in heaven and earth, who are named by Christ the good shepherd. We find in the 26th verse of the 40th chapter of Isaiah what that good flock is: "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power: not one faileth." We learn that this great flock must be the whole world, the whole universe, from the very declaration of our Saviour: "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost." The ninety and nine that he left, therefore, must have been those with whom he had been in heaven; the one to which he had come was this fallen and guilty world. It was a glorious view of our blessed Saviour's kingdom, that kingdom which ruleth over all; all are the sheep of his pasture, and they all are the work of his hands. "He calleth them all by name: behold, he is strong in power, not one faileth." In the 147th Psalm, in the

4th verse, we have the same thought: "He telleth the number of the stars, he calleth them all by their names." And in a very instructive, but frequently misapplied passage, in the 2nd verse of the 14th chapter of St. John, our Saviour gives us the same idea of the great flock: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." Here the Lord compares the creation of God to one magnificent house, containing many mansions, and one mansion in that house prepared for Christ's redeemed and glorified Church. So we find, in the 3rd chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the same view given to us of the great flock, under the same figure of a house; for it is said in the 1st and 3rd to the 6th verses, "For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man, but he that built all things is God. Moses verily, was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ, as a son over his own house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." "Whose house are we," is not intended to be a limited expression, but an inclusive one. The house spoken of here is all things built by God, as he that is over that house is the Son of God. Inasmuch, therefore, as Christ was speaking of the lost sheep as that which he came to save, and of the ninety and nine sheep, as those whom he had left when he came to save the lost, it cannot be that the ninety and nine were righteous men, and the lost sheep the sinful man; but the ninety and nine were the unfallen world, and the lost one was this ruined, guilty, fallen world.

This brings us to think of the state of that thing which Christ came to save. He calls it the lost; it had wandered from its right dwelling-place; it was ruined; "darkness was upon the face of the deep," was the physical image of the moral darkness that was upon this ruined world. "All had sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" and God from heaven looked down upon this world, and he saw it was a lost world; and just as a sheep which wanders from its fold, never would return again to that fold, but continue for ever to wander in the wilderness. So this world, having departed from God, never would have sought him again, but have devoted all its energies to its own ruin, and all its capacities to its own increasing misery. It could not be better described than in that one word,—lost! Having forfeited all claim to God's mercy, having forfeited all enjoyment of God's bounties, having utterly shattered its whole ability to guide itself, it was lost; everything that could contribute to its well being forfeited, and that for ever! Therefore Christ, looking at this world as the lost thing, compares God and himself towards it as the shepherd. If a man have a hundred sheep, and lose one, is he willing to lose that sheep? And if God have a great fold, a great flock in heaven and earth, is he willing to leave his lost ones to be lost for ever? No; he is the Great Shepherd; and if we would understand rightly the character and the person of the Great Shepherd, we must take him in a twofold point of view:

First, In his Divine being.

And secondly, In his Divine and human being united.

In his Divine being we have him spoken of in the Old Testament, before the incarnation; and there he is, indeed, spoken of in divine tenderness, in divine com-

passion, in divine exercise of fatherly power. Yet every such description *in the Old Testament is rather an attribute than a description;* for, in the nature of things, the word compassion does not apply to God, for compassion means a fellow-feeling, that feeling which we have in our hearts when our hearts are affected by the misery of others. Now, no feeling can be drawn out in God's heart. He is in no degree a passive being. Therefore, wherever we read of compassion, or of any passion or emotion of mind in God, it is only attributed to him when it is applied to his Divine nature. All that is active in such qualities may be found in God: nothing that is passive can at all be found in him. Yet, in the 40th chapter of Isaiah, he says, in the 10th and 11th verses, "Behold, the Lord will come with strong hand, and his arm will rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." In no strict or proper sense can this apply to God, so far as concerns the compassionate part of the shepherd's office. It may, indeed, express his active care; it may express the exercise of the Divine power; but there is a blessed, beauteous sense of the shepherd care, that could not be exercised by God in his Divine essence. Yet how frequently is the shepherd care of God brought before us in the Old Testament, before the incarnation, that we may see in it what we could not have seen, if the doctrine had not been revealed to us until the incarnation. It would have seemed altogether human, if we only knew Jesus as the shepherd. Now, in the 147th Psalm, [illegible] the same blessed tenderness of God, in the gr[illegible]

his majesty and the minuteness of his tenderness, where it says, in the 3rd to the 5th verse, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds: he telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names: great is our Lord, and of great power, his understanding is infinite." He that can tell the number of the stars, he that can call them into existence, and can keep them in their places, he stoopeth to heal the broken in heart, and bind up the wounded spirit. It was this character of the shepherd care of God that enabled David to say, in the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want." But it is the New Testament which gives its completeness to the revelation of God that we have in the Old. There we have not only God but man, and not only man but God; we have God and man for ever united in one person. So that we look upon the Lord Jesus Christ as including within himself all the Divine power and care of the Shepherd of the Universe, and including within himself all the fatherly sympathies and human passions of the Great Shepherd of his sheep. The incarnate Shepherd is that which gives to this parable its most beautiful and instructive value. "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost." That leads us to reflect how it was that God could become the human shepherd of the sheep. In the 13th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle reminds us of the great price at which that great office was obtained by the Son of man. In the 20th and 22nd verses it is written, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work to do his will, working in you

that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." Through the blood of the everlasting covenant he became the Great Shepherd of the sheep; and this reminds us of his precious word, "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." It was not an office easily obtained by our blessed Redeemer. It cost him his life of suffering; it cost him his death of atonement; it cost him all that he had covenanted to do and to bear, as he endured the life by which he purchased to himself the blessed office of being the Great Shepherd to the lost sheep of the human family. It reminds us, brethren, of the great value that Christ set upon his lost ones, and of the unchangeable character of the holy law of God, that when even the Son of God would become the shepherd of lost and ruined sheep, he must become the son of man, take our sins upon him, take our punishment upon him, bear our sins in his own body on the tree, and that through the everlasting covenant which was made between God the Father and God the Son before the world was,—the Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Here we have, indeed, a blessed view presented to us of that character which our Saviour was acquiring for himself on earth. He must seal it with his blood before he became the Great Shepherd of the sheep. "He came to seek and to save that which was lost;" and he could not be the great shepherd to the sheep until he laid down his life's blood as the purchase of that much desired office. Thus we have presented to our view the incarnate Shepherd: nothing the less God because he had become man, and nothing the less man because he was united with God. Here we return again to the revelation of the shepherd care that we find in the Old

Testament; and we find an accuracy of meaning, a propriety of word, a depth of truth, a fulness of sympathy, a unity of suffering, a tenderness of human compassion, that these words could not bear if we did not see in them God incarnate. If we return to Isaiah, and hear him saying, "He gathereth the lambs with his arms," do we not bring the light of the Gospel to bear upon that passage, and see the Great Shepherd of the flock with the little one in his arms, greatly displeased with those who would keep them from him, saying, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And if we find the Psalmist saying, "The Lord is my shepherd," the Christian psalmist can find the New Testament version of these words, "The Lord Jesus is my shepherd: I shall not want." If the believer under the Old Testament dispensation could say, "Give ear, O shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock, thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth;" and if the prophet, under the same dispensation, could see but only in vision the form of man sitting between the cherubim, the Christian believer can give incarnate truth to that which was but a distant vision to the Jewish people; and as he lifts up the eyes of his faith, and the heart of his love, to the heaven of God's holiness, there he can see the Shepherd of Israel, not a man in vision, but a man in reality, the Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.

This brings us to consider the work of the Shepherd. His work, as he prepared himself to be the shepherd of the sheep, is not part of his work, except as preparatory indeed. We are not to forget the wormwood and the gall; we are not to forget the life of suffering, and the

death of pain; when we think of the character of the Shepherd of the sheep. We are not to look at him in his glory, and overlook his wounded hands, pierced side, and transfixed feet. When the apostle looked up into heaven, he saw the Lamb as it had been slain; and when he heard the thanksgiving of heaven, it was "Worthy the Lamb that was slain, to receive honour, and power, and wisdom, and glory, and blessing." But that was the preparatory work which belonged to the shepherd, but not the work of the shepherd. His work as a shepherd is that which he is now performing, as sitting between the cherubim. He is the Great Shepherd of Israel! The thought that this parable presents to us is what our blessed Saviour is now doing, as seeking that which was lost; as being now the shepherd who sends his under-shepherds throughout the whole world, that they may gather his sheep from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south. It is of that work of Christ's office, as shepherd, that the apostle Peter says, in the 2nd to the 4th verses of the 5th chapter of the 1st Epistle of Peter, "Feed the flock of God that is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint but willingly, not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

If we would see the work of Christ, as the Great Shepherd, we must see the work of the under-shepherds. As showing, then, the work of our blessed Redeemer, we turn to the 34th chapter of the prophet Ezekiel, and you will there see his part of the shepherd's work. It is but the image of the perfect work of the Great F

herd of Israel; and we see in the deficiencies and the neglect of men, who were but unfaithful shepherds, what is the real work of the true and faithful Shepherd of the sheep in the 2nd to the 4th verses. The prophet says, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say unto them, thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds: woe be to the shepherds of Israel, that do feed themselves. Should not the shepherds feed the flock? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool; ye kill them that are fed, but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick; neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them." Here, therefore, we see in contrast what is the work of the good shepherd: to feed the flock, and to bring them to the pastures of Divine truth, and to the food of Divine grace; and if he find a diseased member of his flock, he strengthens that which was diseased; if he find a sick member of his flock, he heals the sick; if he find the broken in heart and spirit, he binds up that which was broken; if he find the wanderer, he brings him back to the ways of truth and holiness; if there be the lost, he seeks that which was lost; if there be need of government, it is not with force and cruelty, but with tenderness, and kindness, and care, that he will thus rule and govern them with a blessed hand. Here is that blessed work of Christ, the Good Shepherd, for which he receives the Spirit, and for which he was willing to bow down his head and die, that he might be able to say, as we have again in the 61st chapter of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord God

is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound: to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God, and to comfort all that mourn, to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, and the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." Here is, indeed, a blessed work of the Good Shepherd, by which he can speak peace to the troubled heart; by which, with one touch of his heavenly hand, he can heal the diseases of our corrupted frame, by which he can lift up the soul that is bowed down, and give the oil of joy for the bruisings of human mourning; and in the fulness of blessings that is in him, who is thus our good shepherd, enables the believer to say as the old psalmist did, I shall not want, for the Lord is my shepherd; he maketh me to lie down in green pastures, and there he provides a fold, and in providing the fold procures me refreshment; he leadeth me beside the still waters, and in the calmness of those waters the troubled spirit may find peace, and the agitated soul may find its calmness. He leadeth me beside the still waters; he restoreth my soul, leading me in the paths of righteousness, restoring me from the errors of youth, from the wandering of sin, from the wretchedness of a burdened conscience, restoring me to paths of righteousness, and being with me, so that in the shadow of death I shall fear no evil, for there will be the companion that can make all peace. In the presence of dang

shall be the sense of safety, in the need of supply there shall be the anointing of oil, in the day of wandering there shall be the goodness that shall follow us all the days of our life, and bring us back to and make us dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

We should dwell upon this care of the Good Shepherd in this respect, how he is daily caring, daily reclaiming, daily, hourly pleading with us, sanctifying us, guiding us, purifying us, pitying us as the Shepherd of Israel, whose eyes neither slumber nor sleep, and whose heart never ceases to care for his believing people. In that work we find that it is performed one by one, for where there is "one sinner that repenteth, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God." It is a work upon which heaven has its eyes fixed, and its heart gladdened, because it is the work of Him who is the Shepherd of lost souls, and who is also the Shepherd of heavenly folds.

Lastly, let us consider its results. When that sheep is reclaimed, he bringeth it back to the fold, saying, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. Oh, how glorious a truth is set before us; a truth which is not yet fulfilled, the fulness of which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive of. To take up the idea with which we began these thoughts, if the lost sheep be this world, it is a reclaimed world that Christ is to bring to its place when his work is ended; it is a glorified church for which Christ is to call in his ninety and nine of the angelic worlds to rejoice with him. The Good Shepherd, when he shall present a world that was once lost; a people that were once ruined, defiled with sin, laden with iniquity, wandering in error, ruined by their own

waywardness; when he shall present that world, raised from the depths of corruption, from the shadow of death, from the wanderings of error, from the waywardness of human failings, from the want of all things, raised to the brightness of Divine glory, to the spotlessness of Divine purity, to the gladness of Divine joy, to the completeness of Christ's work, and he shall present his church to himself a glorified church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish. And when he shall not only, in the presence of his Father, but in the presence of the angels of God, say, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which were lost, I have reclaimed that world which I have redeemed by my blood, I have glorified that world which had been defiled with sin, I have completed that work for which I bowed down my head: rejoice with me, for I have accomplished that work which I came to do: "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost," and here it is, saved, perfected, glorified: rejoice with me.

Brethren, let us put ourselves continually under the care of that Shepherd of Israel, and let us be able to say in every varying experience of life, "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want."

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XI.

THE TWO DEBTORS.

ST. MATTHEW xviii., v. 34 and 35.—"*And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him: so likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*"

Can anything be of greater importance to us than to know the rule of judgment, when we come to stand before the great white throne; in other words, to know the relationship in which we stand to God in our responsibilities to him? Now there are very few persons who have so harmonized the statements of holy Scripture as not to feel themselves constantly confused and perplexed with apparently contradictory statements. In one place we find that our works have nothing to do with our acceptance before God; in another place we find it declared, that when the Lord comes he will render to every man according to his works; in another we find that pardon is declared to be an unchangeable pardon. In this place we are told that the debtor who was once forgiven had those pardoned sins brought up against him again, and; as it is in our text, he was delivered to the tormentors.

It is, therefore, of the greatest importance, brethren, that we should be able to harmonize these apparently contradictory statements of Scripture; that we should know clearly what is the relationship in which we stand towards Him with whom we have to do. The reason of the confusion is, that we do not distinguish between the Gospel, as a remedial system, and the relationship in which we stand to God as his creatures. God, our Creator, never could cease to stand in the relationship of Creator to creatures. God, our Redeemer, could not neutralize that unchangeable right in which he stands to us as our Creator and Governor. And it is just in the right adjustment of these two relationships of God to us that consist all the reconciliation and the harmony, and all the glory, order, and beauty, that in reality exist between these two views of God's relationship and God's government of us.

This doctrine of forgiveness is by our blessed Saviour here connected with the doctrine of our mutual forgiveness one of another; that he who has not learned to be forgiving, will not himself be forgiven at the last day. "So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." This is the conclusion drawn by our blessed Saviour from his parable of the two debtors: the one, who owed to his lord ten thousand talents, and the other who owed to his fellow-servant three hundred pence, The man who owed ten thousand talents was freely forgiven. He went, according to the parable, and did not forgive his fellow-servant. He was seized upon,—his want of forgiveness brought him into responsibility for his original debt, notwithstanding its having been forgiven,—and delivered over to the tor-

mentors, until the whole should be paid. Christ declares that this is the manner in which God will deal with those who do not forgive every one his brother their trespasses.

The parable was an answer to an inquiry made by St. Peter, who asked, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" Man, in his measure of forgiveness, would have thought seven a great many times to forgive; for human forbearance is, indeed, but short-lived forbearance, and human endurance does not continue long. Peter, who soon, so soon, needed a great pardon from Christ, here found it an exceedingly difficult thing to learn to forgive his brother; and when he thought he had an idea of forgiveness, such as would be fit to bring for approval before Jesus, he asked, shall I forgive him so often as seven times? as if he had said, shall I not be a very forbearing man to forgive him seven times: if my brother should come and repent his offence seven times, one after another, and each time I forgive him, Lord, will that be sufficient? "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him: until seven times?" It is well for us that the measure of the Divine forgiveness is not to be estimated by the conjectures of human forbearance. Well for us is it that the long-suffering, and goodness, and gentleness of Christ is not to be measured by the short-suffering, the want of gentleness, and the want of forbearance, even of Christ's people. It was not a heathen man, nor was it an uninstructed Jew, but it was a converted man, of whom Christ had said, "Blessed art thou, Simon P
that asked this question of our Lord, and kne
right measure of Christian forbearance and fo
And Jesus said unto him, "I say not unto thee,
times, but until seventy times seven." Whe

member who was the apostle that asked this question of Christ, there is still greater beauty in the answer, and deeper instruction in the incident. It was he who was so soon to need forgiveness; he who was so soon to stand in the presence of that very Saviour in the hour of his Master's tribulation, and make those forgiving ears of Christ to hear those words of blasphemy in which he began to curse and to swear, saying, "I know not the man." Little did Peter know, when he was about to ask this question of Jesus, little did he know how soon he should need a better forgiveness than that which should be measured by seven times; and little did he think of the forgiveness and goodness of our blessed Saviour, who had provided this incident as a token of mercy, as a lesson of comfort, to his Christ-denying servant. Here was he who could see into the future, and doubtless had before his mind at this very moment the then future scene in the palace of the high-priest. He who could picture to himself all that took place on that fearful night, when there was the high-priest and the servants in bitter hatred; and when there was the apostle afraid to acknowledge his Master, and denying that he knew anything about him. And here we have Jesus providing light for such a time of darkness as that, reminding Peter that seventy times would be still but a short measure of the forgiveness of our holy Redeemer: "I said not unto thee till seven times, but till seventy times seven."

It is indeed most instructive to see that in the parable before us Christ gives an apparent lesson of great severity, when he intended to teach us a lesson of the greatest mercy. In true love there is the quality of severity as well as the quality of tenderness. He who

loves much, hates much. "Ye who love the Lord," says the psalmist, "hate well;" and that very quality of mind that makes us love holiness, makes us hate sin just in proportion to the depth and truth of our love of holiness. And He who has made us, just in proportion to his love of innate holiness, has also his tremendous hatred of that which is sinful and unholy. And we find in the Scriptures, that those places which speak most sweetly of the love of Christ, speak most fearfully of the judgments of Christ; that those lips of our blessed Saviour that said, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," are the very lips that said, "Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites; ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?" Heaven-descended love, therefore, is not that soft feeling which cannot speak a rebuke, which cannot give a warning, which cannot put to pain; while it is indeed that blessed feeling that can pardon times without number. He does not say unto us until seven times, but until seventy times seven; and yet, if we reckon our own multiplied forgivenesses from our blessed Redeemer, it would be ten thousand times ten thousand these seventy times seven.

This subject is of so great importance, and of so great a variety of aspects, that it would be impossible for me to deal with it in one sermon. I shall, therefore, this morning only consider one feature of our Lord's teaching here, and that is the government and judgment of God the Father. We stand in a peculiar relation to God:

I. As our Creator;

II. As our Redeemer.

The relationship of creature to Creator, as I have

said, cannot cease, although it may for a time be modified, and is modified by the introduction of the Gospel of forgiveness, and forbearance, and grace. As our Creator, God has, therefore, an inalienable right over every one of us, as our Creator and sustainer he is our moral governor; and as his nature could not change, the laws of government which came from the Divine nature cannot change, and therefore that God must reward virtue and must punish vice belongs to the unchangeable nature of God. He could not do otherwise; for if he did, he would cease to be God. And if God be also good in the necessity of his goodness, so far as we may presume to reason upon them, he could not do otherwise than provide a remedy for his fallen creatures. Not that there was a higher being to necessitate him to do so. The only necessity under which God acts is the necessity of being himself, and of acting in conformity with himself. If he be holy, he must act holily; if he be good, he must act kindly; if he be just, he must act justly; and if he be forbearing, he must manifest forbearance. God is no negative, passive being; all that he is, that he is in the energy of his power and activity; and, therefore, he who has revealed himself to us as our Creator and Sustainer, manifests himself to us also as the sin-pardoning and soul-cleansing God, yet so manifests himself as not to destroy or neutralize those other attributes of God's nature exhibited in his government. The feature, therefore, in which God presents himself as our Creator towards sinful beings is that he has given over the government of the world for a season to his own Son; and that it is to his incarnate Son, God and man, that God has given the government of this world for a season; and not only of this earth, upon which human

beings are dwelling, but that he has put all the angels of heaven under the incarnate Son of God, that in his human and Divine nature he may be the administrator of the Divine government for a season. In the 5th chapter of St. John our Saviour says, in the 22nd verse, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son." We have the Father and the Son united in creation and providence in this chapter, where Christ says, in the 19th verse, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." Here is co-operation between the Father and the Son in the work of grace, and in the work of providence. In that of judgment the Father is represented by Christ as standing aside, and committing the work of judgment unto the Son: "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father: He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." And in the 27th verse, the Father "hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man." Here, therefore, we have the Father as creator, as supreme, committing or delegating all judgment unto the Son, and that not only as the Son of God, but as the Son of man. Christ, therefore, is now administering the government of the universe in the name of the Father, and by the power of his own Divine and human nature. In that government of Christ, the apostle Peter tells us in his First Epistle, 3rd chapter and 22nd verse, that "He is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels, and authorities, and powers being made

subject unto him." Here, therefore, not only human beings, are put under the judgment or government of Christ, but angels, authorities, and powers are also made subject to him for the administration of that government which Christ is now exercising. And this is what we may call a parenthesis of the Divine government; not the suspension of government, but a modification of it, exercising the creative power of God in a new mode. "The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son." It is that government of Christ that he is to surrender when the work is accomplished. In the 15th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle, speaking of the resurrection of the dead, says in the 28th verse, "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him, that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." If we supply from our Lord's own lips the word "man" here, we have the full statement conveyed by the Spirit: "Then shall the Son of man also himself be subject unto him which did put all things under him, that God may be all in all." The divine government of the Father may be again resumed, that the Father, Son, and Spirit may govern without that mediatorial work which has been rendered necessary by the fall of man.

Now if we look at these two views of the Divine government, they reconcile those two great difficulties between God and man. There is a Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we could not come to the Father but through the Son. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." But between Christ and man there is no mediator: there we have man coming to man, and no mediator between

them. Popery indeed, in her blasphemy against the love of Christ, would place the ever blessed Virgin between Christ and his Church; but the Bible teaches us, that there is no mediator between man and Jesus. He is the High Priest that can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and to him we come and plead his own mediation, to him we come and plead his own government. We do not ask him for the sake of saints, but we come to himself, for he said, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We are in this sense Christ's servants without any mediator, as we are God's servants with a mediator. The apostle says in the 14th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, the 17th and 18th verses, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; for he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men." There is therefore, brethren, a double judgment to which we have to look, the judgment which our Lord Jesus Christ exercises towards us all, and the judgment which God is to have upon us when the work of mediation, the work of redemption, shall have been accomplished, the work of mediation shall have been surrendered, and we shall be standing in God's presence without any mediator between us and him. It is probably to that, that our Lord refers in the 16th chapter of the Gospel of St. John, where he says, in the 25th to the 27th verses, "These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs; but the time cometh when I shall no more speak to you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name; and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye

loved me, and believed that I came out from God." Christ is now exercising the mediatorial office, which is to terminate when he shall come again in the glory of his Father, and in his own glory and of the holy angels, to surrender up his mediatorial kingdom, and to be with the Father and the Holy Ghost, God all in all, exercising the primary office of the government of God, our creator and sustainer. We are, therefore, to look forward to Christ's judgment of us, and then subsequently to God's judgment and government: and Christ, who is now our holy, sacrificing high priest, sanctifier, and redeemer, is to sit upon the judgment-seat, and to pass the solemn sentence upon all his people. As he is the Son of man, so he tells us that he has to exercise judgment as the Son of man; for if we return to the 5th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, we shall find him saying there, in the 28th and 29th verses, "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil into the resurrection of damnation," It is the voice of the Son of man that is heard here; it is the Son of man's voice that calls them forth from the grave; it is the Son of man who says unto those on his left hand, "Depart, ye cursed," as it is the Son of man who says unto those on his right hand, "Come, ye blessed." This is the real argument of the apostle in the 15th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, where he says from the 22nd to the 24th verse, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order; Christ the first fruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to

God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power. And as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. Thus the Son of man is a brother to all men, the just as well as the unjust. In that common brotherhood he raises from the dead all his brethren, the wicked dead and the holy dead, but every man in his own order, Christ's people first and then the evil remnant in death and shades, to be cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, and experience the weight of the curse of their connection with Christ, of having been bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, and yet remaining corrupt, and sinful, and rebellious. It is an awful doctrine, therefore, that our blessed Saviour teaches us in this parable, that the pardoned sinner was afterwards a condemned sinner. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

On Sunday next, if it please God, I shall take up this same subject, and enter into a most important scriptural enquiry respecting the secret counsels, the unchangeable promises of God, and the unconditional irreversibility of the pardon that comes to God's people in Christ, and of the changing promise, and of the conditional and temporary pardon that comes to the whole world through Christ.

It is indeed, brethren, an awful subject; it is also a blessed subject. We are sinners; and every one of us, good and bad, believer and unbeliever, are, temporarily speaking, pardoned sinners. We stand in this house this day before God, and Christ, and angels, precisely in the relationship spoken of here of that man who, owing ten thousand talents, but having nothing to pay, was

freely forgiven, but only forgiven upon his probation. That we may be pardoned in time, in order to have an opportunity of being pardoned for eternity. Oh, let us pray that we may be able to lay hold in such a manner upon the hope set before us in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may not only have that temporary, and passing, and present, but yet real forgiveness, which we have in being members now of Christ; but that we may have that eternal forgiveness that will take away our sins for ever, and secure our blessedness for ever, when we rise from the grave, and live eternally and immortally with Christ for ever.

It is my duty to appeal also to you this morning for that important Society, which has for its object the proclaiming of this blessed Gospel of pardon throughout this kingdom. It is the voice of Christ to you, brethren, for not merely thousands, but millions of souls of our suffering brethren, who are needing the labourers in the harvest, and needing much more than ever we have yet done; for we have not yet, as Christians, the mind of Christ in us in its full activity, or we would have the hand of Christ in us in its loving bounty. If it were not so it would not be true, in this era of our Reformed Churches, that there is a larger number of persons in this kingdom uncared for than those cared for, in the preaching of the Gospel. If the words of Christ are what they ought to be, if the prayers of Christians sent forth were really importunate, we should not have toil and pleading to get an inadequate supply of men to go forth in their Saviour's name; not to deserts and distant wilds, but to our own neglected courts and alleys; to our thousands of fellow-subjects, who are *uncared for, living in the midst of us, dark in the midst of light,*

unholy in the midst of the preached Gospel, while we ourselves have a house in which to worship, and the Gospel of God preached to us. We have indeed, in this respect, much need to ask for pardon from Him who has set such an example of bounty and forgiveness, as to give not merely what he had, but to give himself also, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XII.

THE TWO DEBTORS.

ST. MATTHEW, xviii., v. 34 35.—"*And his Lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*"

It is part of the evidence of the truth of scripture revelation that it adapts itself to every part of our nature and that it meets all our circumstances. If it did not so it could not be from Him who professes to give that which is able to make us perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

On last Sunday, in considering this text, I took the view of God as our Creator and God as our Redeemer, and endeavoured to show how the dealings which flow from these two characters of God apparently contradict each other and cause many difficulties to those who read the bible. We have the same difficulties meeting us here with regard to the adaptation of God's dealings towards our nature. As immortal beings, desirous of eternal happiness, we cannot but wish for security. As moral beings, capable of acting upon motives, we cannot but

our will and power of choice, and can give us the opportunity of serving him, or the opportunity of wandering from him; dealing with us in his providences according to our moral nature, and leaving to us that power of choice without which service would be but slavery, and obedience would be but fatalism.

Now our Saviour here speaks to us and says, "So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses likewise:" thus God is represented as doing with his servant, whom he had forgiven all debt, afterwards calling upon him to pay that debt. It suggests to us that we may be forgiven our sins and yet lose that pardon, and be delivered over to the tormentors. Now while this is a great truth that is taught in this parable, that we may not mistake that truth, I purpose with God's assistance this morning to consider how this principle is not opposed to what our Blessed Saviour tells us of the safety of his people, of the unalterable nature of the everlasting pardon given to God's elect, and how men may be in God's counsel safe while they are in God's providence in a state of probation, or in danger of being lost, as they are in our text. There are in scripture those promises which are unchangeable, coming from God's unalterable covenant: there are in scripture too, those promises which are changeable proceeding from God's moral dealings towards his people. We have in scripture the marks by which we can know whether we have laid hold of the unalterable promises, and also the feelings which ought to occupy our whole being in thinking of God's alterable promises.

I. I shall first therefore consider the scripture testimony respecting the unchangeable covenant of God's love

towards his own elect people, that he has in his secret counsels determined to save his people, and that he will accomplish that purpose, to the praise of the glory of his grace; so that in the last day it will be seen that it was not the will of man but the unchangeable counsel of God that rescued a fallen church, that disciplined it to all the providences of life, and that finally will bring it to that spotlessness of glory in which it shall be a faultless bride for his own service. "He hath chosen us in Christ," says the apostle, "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." That choice was upon no other condition than the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, he fulfilled the conditions of that covenant of scripture, the salvation of his own people. In him they are safe, and in him they have so far as they are concerned an unconditional salvation, "my sheep shall never perish nor shall any man pluck them out of my hand, my Father which gave them me is greater than I, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." If we turn to the 54th chapter of the Prophet Isaiah, we shall see there, the unchangeable covenant of God's love declared to be founded upon unconditional promises, not resulting from the foreseen obedience of God's people, but in despite of their foreseen disobedience resting alone upon the unchangeable love of God. We there see in the 6th to the 13th verse, "For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken, and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou was refused saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For

this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wrath with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." It is impossible for any sophistry of man to bring in conditions, human conditions into the covenant of salvation as presented to us here. It is declared to be as the waters of Noah, the sworn covenant of God, on the same conditions as God's covenant with Noah. Now if we turn to the 8th chapter of Genesis we find that God's covenant with Noah was this, that he never would drown the world again with a flood, although man after the flood, was to be as sinful as man before the flood. It is said then in the 21st and 22nd verses, "And the Lord smelled a sweet savour, and the Lord said as in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I again smite every thing living as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Although the imagination of man's heart was evil from his youth, yet because the Lord smelled the sweet savour of Noah's sacrifice, he promised he never would again drown the earth with the waters of the flood. Let us suppose that some preacher were to take this promise and in his earnestness for his view of holiness was to warn the world that a flood would again come upon the world, and we were to reply to him we have this promise that it shall not be: and suppose he were to say it was only a

conditional promise, would any as a believer in the bible listen to him? Does not every one that believes the bible believe that that there will not be a flood to drown the world again? And if we see wickedness prevailing, do we fear that the waters of the flood will again come upon the world? Do we not rely upon this conditional promise of God?—a promise made in the foresight of man's sin, telling us for our comfort that this world shall never be drowned again with the waters of the flood. If this be the case with the waters of Noah, so is it with the covenant of God; the Lord hath said, "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me, for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wrath with thee, nor rebuke thee." The token that is mentioned here is a very instructive token. The conditional promises of God are without an oath; the promises of God that have an oath are unconditional promises, unchangeable. The apostle reasons upon them in the 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where he is comparing the Aaronic Priesthood with the Melchisidec Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. He declares that the priesthood that was given to Aaron's sons could be transferred from one to another and might pass away, but that the Melchisidec Priesthood that was given to the Lord Jesus Christ was never to pass away, that theirs was given to them without an oath and therefore changeable, but His was given with an oath and was therefore unchangeable. In the 19th to the 24th verses the Apostle makes this comparison between the two Priesthoods, "for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God. And inasmuch as, not

without an oath *he was made priest;* (for those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, the Lord swear and will not repent, thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisidec:) by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man because he continued ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." The oath is that which the apostle tells us makes the difference of these two promises, the sworn promises of God that are unconditional, and the unsworn promises of God that are conditional.

II. Now if we clearly see in this scripture that there is this covenant with God's people, we have with equal clearness in scripture the secret point that there is a conditional covenant with God's people. The unconditional are belonging to God's elect, the conditional are equally applicable to the whole world, it includes the elect within it for they need the moral discipline the same as the whole world. You will find in the 18th chapter of the Prophet Jeremiah, that the Lord speaking of his promises and his threatenings, says in the 7th to the 10th verses, "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and so destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them." Here is a general principle laid down by the his threatenings and his promises, that where

he threatens a judgment, although he may not express a condition it is always implied; and that where he offers a promise, if that promise is without an oath, although the condition may not be expressed it is always implied that he will reverse this threatening and these promises, according as men are obedient or disobedient. You will find this repeated again to individuals in the 33rd chapter of the Prophet Ezekiel, where it is said in the 13th to the 16th verses, "When I shall say to the righteous that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he hath robbed, walk again the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him; he hath done that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live." Here therefore we have so plainly stated to us that we cannot mistake it, that God when he gives a promise implies this condition, that man is obedient; and that when he gives a threatening he implies this condition, that man continues sinful; but if an obedient man becomes disobedient; or if the sinful man will become obedient, the promise shall be changed into a threatening, or the threatening into a promise. A very striking example of this we have in Eli, that where Eli's sons showed themselves unfit for the priesthood which had been promised to Eli's family, the Lord said in the 2nd chapter of the 1st book of Samuel, in the 30th verse, "Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I

said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." thus we have the scriptures presenting to us two dealings of God, the one with his elect in the secret covenant of his love, unchangeable; the other with man's moral responsible being in the manifested providence of his grace, changeable.

III. We have in the third place to consider, whether we have any marks by which we can apply to ourselves the blessed promise that belongs to God's people. Brethren we have most blessed promises, and they may belong to every one that lays hold upon them. The predestinating love of God is not represented in scripture as the act of mere sovereignty; it proceeds not from one attribute of God, but from God. It contains all the attributes of God, his love, his bounty, as well as his sovereign power. And here is where the metaphysical system of Calvinism is wrong, in dwelling so exclusively upon the sovereign right of God as to forget that he has wisdom, bounty, goodness, and love; that he who has chosen us, has chosen us to holiness and to happiness, that it is the result of his confined attributes not merely of one. So God hath in like manner revealed his counsels to us that they cannot be known by us until he hath revealed them in us. The election of God is a bright light behind a thick veil. The veil must be removed before that bright light is seen: the veil that is upon the heart, that hinders the election of God from being seen is the thick veil of sin; and it is just as that is removed that God's electing love is seen in its holiness, and recorded in its brightness. We are all by nature, the apostle says, the children of

wrath: there is no difference, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We cannot say of the wickedest man that he who is a child of wrath to-day may not be a manifested child of God to-morrow. God's foe to-day, may be God's friend to-morrow, and therefore we have no marks by which we can say of any one,—you are not one of God's people. We have therefore God so presenting election to us that no one can make it an excuse for dejection, much less despair for sin. No, it is only when we lay hold upon the hope set before us that we have the mark of God's people. If we turn to the 6th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find the apostle saying there in the 16th to the 20th verses, "For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus made an high priest for ever, after the order of Melchisidec." It is not to the world that he will shew the immutability of his counsel; it cannot be seen till we can enter within the veil, it is to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, and he does that by the work of his grace in the heart, that we who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon this hope set before us have strong consolation in those two immutable things, God's covenant, and God's oath. Is there not that experience in the heart of man? Do we not find that

timid wavering feeling upon which the name of faith is bestowed, and that for a time in which men hope they are christians, and fear that they are not christians, indulging a feeble hope sometimes that they have the grace of God in them, and fearing at other times that they need it; timid, wavering, doubtful, unstable as water they cannot excel. Is there not that brighter and better hope, that firm hand of faith able to lay hold upon the everlasting and unchangeable promises of God, that can enter within the veil, that can realize everlasting security, not because we are good and holy, but because we are strengthened in faith, and brightened in hope, and able to see into the invisible world, and lay hold upon that hope set before us, which is an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, entering within the veil, seeing him who is behind the veil in the holy of holies, hearing his pleading, trusting his promise, and relying on his love. The marks are given in the 10th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, from the 14th to the 22nd verses, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us; for after that he had said before, this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil that is to say his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil consci-

ence, and our bodies washed with pure water." Here we learn that they are perfected, they are perfected for ever. they are perfected by the one offering of Jesus Christ, once for all; that the perfection is witnessed to by no less a witness than God and the Holy Ghost, and the testimony of God's Holy Spirit is this, that he writes his law in the heart, and he puts it in the mind; he makes men to understand God's truth, to embrace God's truth, and to lay hold upon his promise, and to be assured of this, there is no more offering for sin; there is one atonement, and that is enough. One blood is presented to God, and that sanctifieth fully, we need no other; and having this great high priest we are able to enter into the presence of God, to draw near not with wavering doubts, but with full assurance of faith; to have our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. This is that witness of the Spirit working holy thoughts in us, working holy feelings in us, cleansing us from the pollution of the flesh, raising us to the mind of the Spirit, delivering us from the bondage of ungodly fears, and raising us to the light, and peace, and blessedness of those who apply to their souls that comforting promise, "None shall pluck them out of my hand," This is that which the Apostle declares in the 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, to be the witness of the Spirit, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." The mark therefore of those who have a right to lay hold upon this unchangeable promise is according to God's testimony simply this, that we have God's Holy Spirit renewing our hearts and enabling us to trust him, and as our 17th article very beautifully says, "For the godly

consideration of predestination and our election in Christ is full of pleasant and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members, and drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of everlasting salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doeth fervently kindle their love towards God."

IV. Now in the fourth place we are dealt with in the moral discipline of God, the whole world equally. They who have the blessed assurance of everlasting salvation are addressed according to their moral nature,—to their fears and hopes, to their instincts and desires, quite as much as those who are still outside the veil of Christ's unchangeable mercy. This is the great wisdom of God, that while he meets our frailty, and keeps us safe, he meets our feebleness and makes us strong, he meets our *whole* nature so as to discipline and exercise us. We find in the 3rd chapter of the Epistle to the Collossians, where the Apostle speaking of the manner in which Christ deals with his church, says in the 23rd to the 25th verses, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons." We receive the reward of the inheritance that which is not earned by us; that which is not purchased by us, but that which we have by inheritance, by being born to it, being the sons of God. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruit of his creatures;" and yet

we so receive the reward of the inheritance as not to be negligent in our moral nature: "he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons." In the same way in the 6th chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle says in the 8th verse, "Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." If therefore we have that faith of God's elect which enables us to enter within the veil, and see our names written upon the precious breast-plate of our Great High Priest that has passed into the heavens; we have also the need of God's elect to have our fears addressed, and our hopes addressed, to be assured of this, that whatever be the end we know that the way is a way of moral discipline, that if we sin we shall suffer for it; that if we walk in the way of holiness we shall be blessed in it; that if we keep close to Christ, Christ will keep close to us; that if we wander from Christ, Christ will let us know that it is an evil and a bitter thing that we have wandered from him; that he meets us with the discipline of his all wise dealings, making us to feel the bitterness of sin, and to suffer the consequences of our self-will; and that while he is thus dealing with us in his moral exercise of his attributes, he is keeping us in the unchangeable power of his love, he is dealing somewhat like one who would have a wayward child to deal with, and who would like but too well to walk in his own ways. A wise care-taker of that child, would in order to train it for better things for the future permit him to go to a certain length in his own way, that while he would not be entirely ruined, he would learn lessons of self-rejection instead of his foolish, childish, self-dependance. And so it is our great parent deals

with us, allowing us to learn from our follies, and from our wanderings, and from our foolish self will, to learn our own weakness, our own ignorance, our own sin, that in this way we may learn to keep closely to him who has promised to supply all our need according to the riches of his Divine glory.

Brethren, we have these two feelings to keep before us. Let it be our prayer that we may be enabled to do so. If you have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you, there is an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, in which it is no presumption but most blessed faith to say, "I know in whom I have believed, that he will keep that which I have committed to him until that day." If you have that most blessed faith and hope, keep before your minds also the means of grace as well as the hope of glory. Remember that every talent committed to you is a providential trust from God; that every opportunity of coming to the house of prayer is that which you may make use of for blessing, or you may neglect for judgment; that every opportunity of coming to the Lord's table is a divine gift presented to you to receive Christ in the strengthening and the refreshing of your souls; or a solemn dealing to see what is your moral state. Are you really hungering, are you really thirsty, after more of that heavenly food, for more of the knowledge of the power, and the love of Christ Jesus?

And if there be those who are suffering the consequence of their sins, and yet have not laid hold upon that blessed faith; remember the tender mercies of God, how more than willing he is that his children should come back to him,—how tenderly he pleads with them, "Why will ye die?"—How sweetly he says to their hearts only acknowledge thine iniquity, how thou hast trans-

gressed against the Lord, and I will be a father unto you, and will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters saith the Lord Almighty. Are you suffering under the chastening hand of Christ? the Apostle addressed those in the Corinthians who were thus suffering; as you will find in the 11th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, in the 31st and 32nd verses, "For if we would judge ourselves we should not be judged. But when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world." Even if some were sick and some were dead, under the judgment of God it was not that they should be condemned with the world, but that they should be chastened of the Lord that they might be partakers of his holiness. Oh, how blessed a thing it would be for your souls if you were each able to keep these dealings of God ever present with you, to keep his moral dealings in view, so as to walk watchfully, prayerfully, humbly, and keep his unchangeable promises and sworn covenant in view, as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil!

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XIII.

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

ST. MATTHEW, xviii., v. 33 to 34.—"*And his Lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him; so likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*"

Our final safety and temporal probation are ideas perfectly compatible, and yet in the application of these principles many persons are sorely perplexed. Had we not the truth declared to us that final safety depends on the unchanging counsels and love of God, we never could have any internal grounds of hope to get to heaven. Had we not the discipline of probation we never could have the moral training that is to fit us for heaven. Our frailty needs the certainty of the unchanging counsels of God; our moral nature needs the discipline of the varying providences of God. Now this parable seems to deny the principle of final safety; for the man who had been pardoned is represented as having been subsequently given over to the tormentors, and our Lord adds, "So likewise shall my Heavenly Father

also unto you; if ye from your hearts forgive not every man his brother their trespasses." The blessedness those whose hearts are renewed, and whose persons are justified by faith, is in no degree denied by this parable, inasmuch as its threatenings only apply to the unforgiving; if every really renewed heart is a forgiving heart the parable does not threaten such person. Let us therefore see what it teaches us. It represents the Kingdom of Heaven as being like unto a king who found a servant that owed him ten thousand talents; he forgave him freely, he kept him in his service, remitted his punishment, and retained him in his family. That servant did not conduct himself with similar principles towards his fellow servant; and the same king takes him and brings him into a second account for the former debt; he delivers him over to the tormentors till the whole debt was paid. Our Lord gives us this as the similitude of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is of the church on earth. We have, therefore, to enquire in what sense persons may receive pardon, and yet afterwards be punished for their sins. In following out the teaching of Holy Scripture on this important subject. I shall consider,

I. The nature of pardon,

II. The pardon which belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven.

III. The privileges, responsibilities, and duties resulting from that pardon.

Brethren, this is a complicated as well as a most important subject; it requires our earnest and close attention; it requires our prayerful thoughtful hours. Let us pray that the blessed Spirit of God may enlighten the eyes of our understanding, may quicken the affec-

tion of our hearts, and give us that diligence of attention to this deeply important subject, as may make us hear profitably unto our own salvation.

I. Let us first then consider the nature of pardon and that in four respects.

1. In the mind of the offended party.
2. In the declaration of that mind.
3. In the exercise of pardon.
4. In its enjoyment.

1st. What is the nature of pardon in general; not only God's pardon, but man's pardon? The general subject of forgiveness is in the mind of the offended party. It implies that there has been in the mind of the offended party a just reason for being displeased. A pardon with reference to him would be not having the feeling of displeasure, but a feeling of acceptance in his own mind towards the person who had so deserved punishment from him. Our primary idea of pardon therefore is a state of mind in the offended party which does not desire the punishment, but rather desires reconciliation with the offending party.

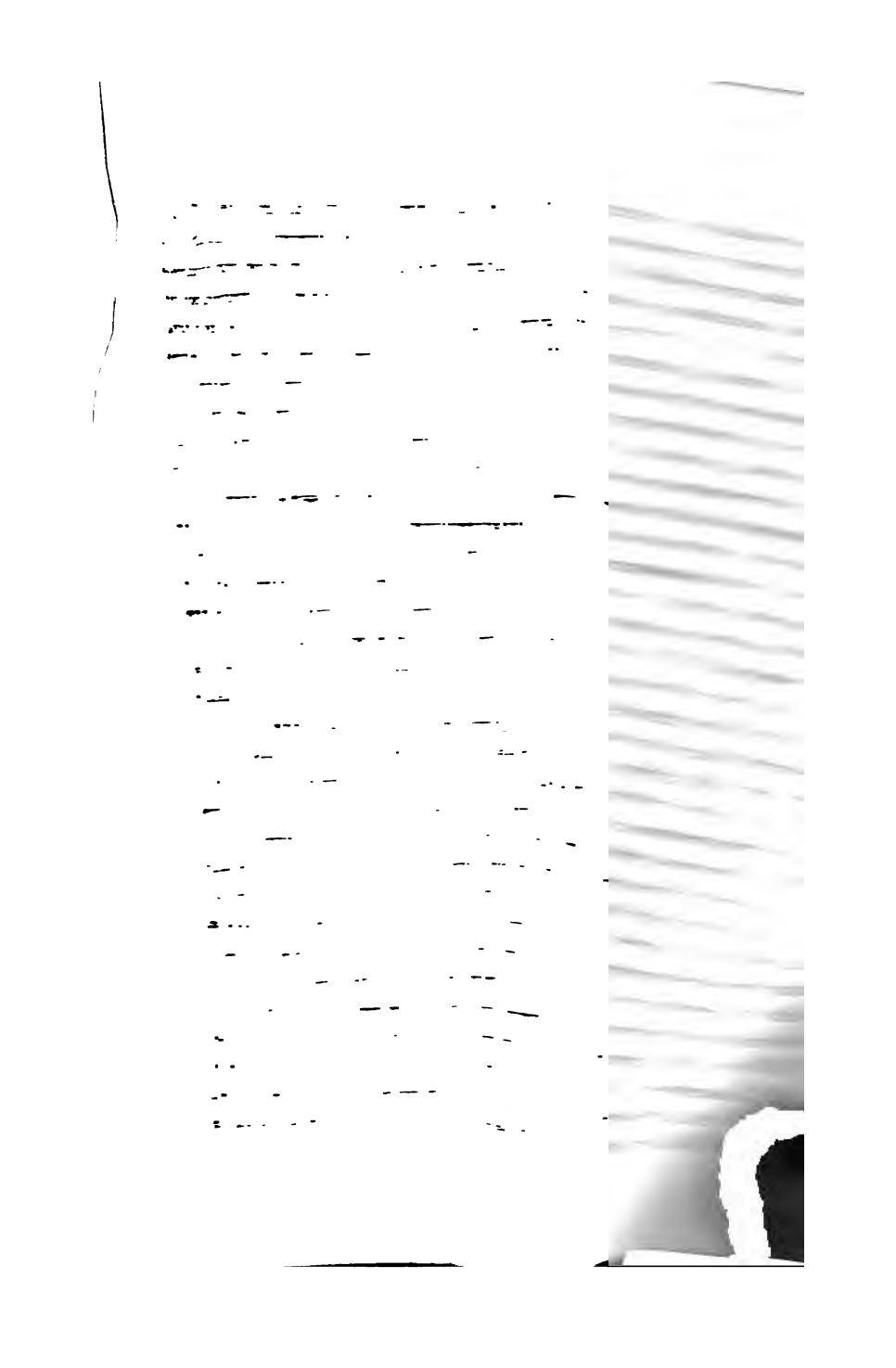
2nd. In the declaration of that mind the offended party may declare his forgiveness although the party offending may be unwilling to receive the forgiveness. Pardon therefore as on one side may be a real and true pardon, while on the other side there is an equal unwillingness to receive it. Yet we should not doubt that there has been a real pardoning, forgiving state of mind in the party offended, without any reference to the state of mind of the offending party. Now in the declaration of pardon, the offended party may send a message of forgiveness to the other, may provide the means of return, may entreat him to return, and so be in a forgiving state of mind towards the party offending, without any refer-

ence to the condition of that person's mind when he may remain most unwilling to return, he may reject all the offers of pardon, he may continue in his ungrateful enmity against the offended party, and yet this would not in the smallest degree alter the fact of the offended party having proclaimed forgiveness, free, full forgiveness, having been most willing that the other should return and receive his blessing.

3rd. In the exercise of pardon, it may be all on one side in this way, or it may embrace both sides. The party offending may accept that pardon, he may return, may be admitted into his household, may have continual relation with him, may be again and again doing something that ought to give him offence; may have need to come and ask him for that forgivenesss, and may receive it as often as he asks, and the comforting assurance of the love, and the kindness and goodness of the party who ought to be offended, would be the best attraction to his coming back again to ask his forgiveness for the multitude of little acts that would need it, of which he might be inadvertently or wilfully guilty.

4th. Now in the enjoyment of that pardon, a man who had been dismissed from another's house, or another's service, and was re-admitted into the family, or into the service could have no doubt of his general pardon, although dwelling in the house there might be need of his every hour coming and asking some forgiveness for similar offences or similar failures in that household. Here therefore we have a picture presented to us of the nature of divine and human pardon, the nature of forgiveness in general: and from this let us turn to consider,

II. The pardon which belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven.

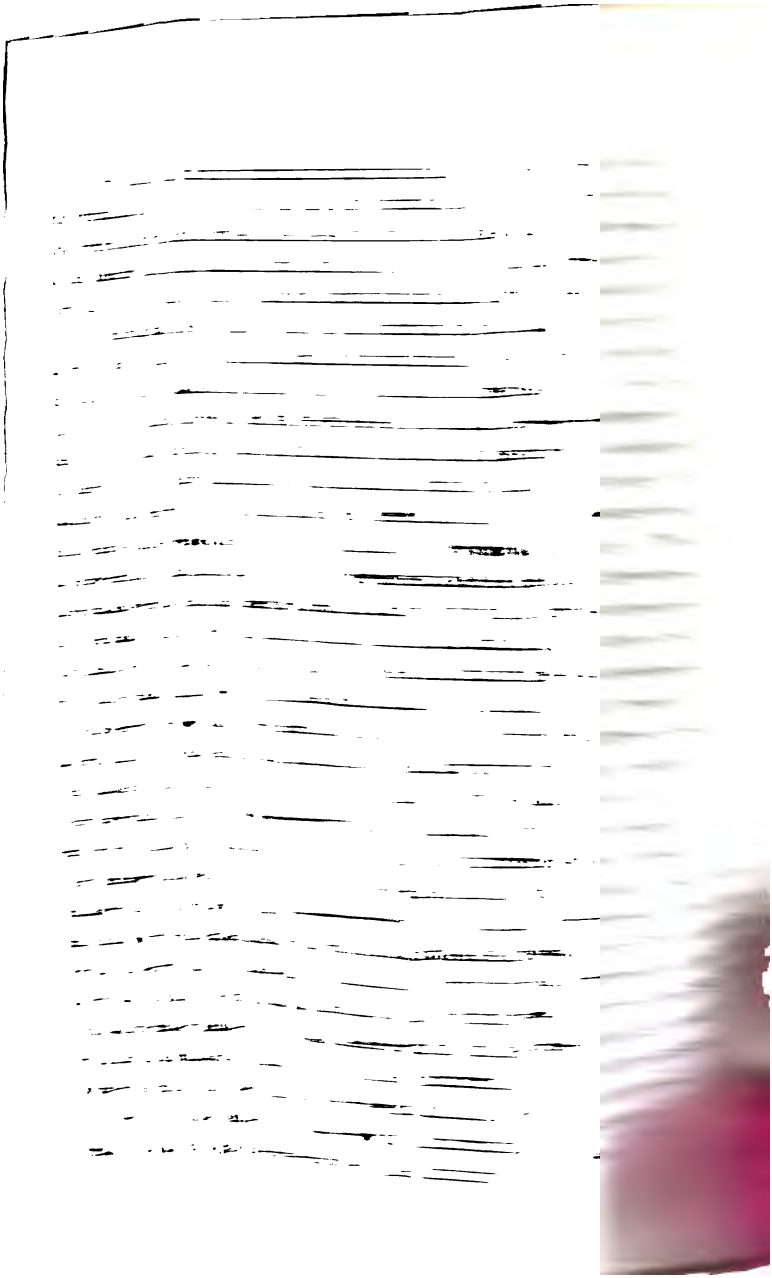


probationary pardon, there is that of God so exercised as to be consistent with the moral condition of man. God looked at the whole world and gave his Son to die for that world, upon this condition, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. That which is true of the world, is more especially true of the church; for Christ gave himself for the church, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." But there is another condition of human pardon, and a real, full pardon, pardon not only in the forgiving disposition of the mind of one party, but in the confidence that that party can place in the other. God enters into a covenant of pardoning love with his own people, with those who lay hold upon his promises in Christ, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them. With these he enters into a pardoning covenant, not probationary, but real, full, and final. Just as we may forgive some one on probation, because we do not confide in that person's future consistency in his feelings towards us; or we may forgive a person, assured that that person will never again offend towards us. In the one case there would not be the confidential admission into redemption; in the other case it would be as if it had never been: we should feel that that person would never again change. So does God deal with his own people. Where he renews the heart in love, where he purifies the soul by the Spirits power, and where he brings their persons with acceptance of the covenant into that state of faith which enters within the veil, there is full, final pardon, of which the spirit of God says "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." But we have to consider this

in connexion with that pardon which occupied us so much last Sunday, but as this probationary pardon which God exercises in the church of which Christ himself more especially and permanently says here, "so likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother." If there be therefore in the mind of God a forgiving disposition towards the world, we have

2nd. To consider the declaration of that mind on the part of God. He declares it in his mercy to the whole world, the bounties of God could not come from an unforgiving disposition. The goodness of God, the forbearance and long-suffering of God, could not come from an unforgiving state of mind in God towards man. And to this natural declaration of a pardoning state of mind does the Apostle frequently refer; as you will find in the 14th chap. of the Acts of the Apostles, and the 17th verse, "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from Heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Surely that state of mind that opens the hand of bounty to give food, and opens the heart of kindness to give gladness, is not an unforgiving state of mind. Here is therefore what I may call the natural declaration of God's pardoning mind towards the whole world. So in the 17th chap. of the same book of Acts, in the 26th to the 28th verses, we find the Apostle again addressing idolatrous heathens, and saying, "He hath made of one blood all the nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if happy they might feel after ihm and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

for in him we live, and move, and have our being." Here therefore we have not only God giving us food and gladness, but God in us, that we may feel after him and find him; and that not merely in the converted man, or in the baptized or circumcised man, but in the heathen. Amongst all men, that we may feel after him and find him, for in him we live and move, and have our being. Comparing thus the grace of God's moral dealing as we have it in the Book of Jonah, in the 7th chap. and the 8th to the 10th verses, we find that the heathen king of Nineveh trusted in the goodness and mercy of God, and he says there, "Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God, ye let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands who can tell of God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not, and God saw their works, that they turned away from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not." If there be in the natural works of God then the manifestation of his pardoning mercies, of his goodness and kindness towards the whole world, we have it more especially in the institution and constitution of the Christian Church. Here is a great institution so constituted as to admit within it all men without exception, without scrutiny, the evil and the good, the child and the aged. The message that is sent into the world is to go into the high ways and hedges, and invite all without exception to come in, and that message of Christ, as we have it in the 24th chap. of St. Luke's Gospel, and the 47th verse, is a message [illegible]d's pardon to the whole world, That repentance [illegible]ission of sin[illegible] be preached in his name [illegible]ons, be[illegible] Jerusa-



Whatever sense therefore we may put on these words, there can be no doubt in the mind of any one who believes his bible, that in some sense the washing away of sins, and the remission of sins, is connected with submission to baptism. "Be baptized for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." That that was but a probationary washing, we may learn from the 2nd Epistle, 1st chap., and 9th verse of Peter, "he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." Being baptized he was admitted into the church. His sins were purged and yet what did he lack? Virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love; he that lacketh these things hath forgotten the very purpose for which he was baptized; he hath fogotten that he was purged from his old sins, and he is but blind and useless, as far as concerns the real power and truth of this Holy Ordinance. We may explain this baptismal pardon by the parallel condition of the Jews in the old dispensation, by the language which is employed to express that condition of a sinner towards the Redeemer. If we look at the 1st chap. of the Gospel of St. Mark, we may read in the 42nd verse, that, "as soon as Jesus had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed." Now here was the leper made truly clean by the Lord Jesus Christ; and yet in the 44th verse, "Jesus saith unto him, see thou say nothing to any man, but go thy way, and show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." Here we see that the word to cleanse does not always mean to make clean, but to pronounce clean. With regard to the truth of the purification of his body from

leprosy, it was not this word of the priest that made him clean, but the previous power of Jesus. But with regard to the admission to the privileges of the church, it was the word of the priest that made him clean. He could not be present at a sacrifice, he could not be at any of their feasts, he could not even sit at their social meals, until, having been a leper, the priest pronounced him clean, and so the priest was said to cleanse him. Here is a plain ecclesiastical use of spiritual terms in which the same thing that is said really with regard to the power of Christ, is said ecclesiastically with regard to the power of the priest; having no real reference to God except a remote one, but a real reference to the church as a human society. Now if we compare this with the 13th chap. of Leviticus, we have the same language used there under the same circumstances, with regard to the man who having had a leprosy was cleansed from it: throughout that chapter the verb is rendered to pronounce clean, as in the 6th verse, "The priest shall look on him again the seventh day, and behold if the plague shall be somewhat dark, and the plague spread not in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean, it is but a scab. And he shall wash his clothes and be clean." Now it was not the priest *that examined and pronounced him clean, that made him clean.* And so throughout that long chapter wherever the word occurs it is rendered 'to pronounce clean.' Yet in the 16th chap. and the 30th verse, (Leviticus,) we have the same word used, "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord." Here therefore, that which is, with regard to the priest, in one place said to be, to pronounce clean, is

in this place rendered, to cleanse; as, "that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord." We cannot put these passages together without seeing that the ecclesiastical use of spiritual terms is intended to apply to the discipline of the church; it is not intended to apply directly to the state of the soul towards God, although it is intended to apply indirectly to that. The man who refuses to submit to church discipline must be in an unsound state of mind and heart towards God; while on the other hand a man may submit to it and yet remain unsound. You will find that such cleansing was not even supposed to be real, but merely and only of necessity, ceremonial and in the flesh, its real and moral cleansing depending upon the state of the heart. As you will find in the 24th chap. of the Prophet Ezekiel, and the 13th verse, the Lord reproaches the Jews with not being benefitted by that cleansing ordinance that he had given them, and that although he had pronounced them clean with his own lips, they were not really clean, and he would bring down a judgment upon them for their uncleanness and sin. "In thy filthiness is leudness; because I have purged thee and thou wast not purged; thou shall not be purged from thy filthiness any more till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." This passage teaches therefore the true purposes of ecclesiastical pardon, of ecclesiastical cleansing, that it is in order to moral and spiritual purgation, but is not itself a moral and spiritual purgation. That it is intended by a visible act and ceremony to express God's state of mind towards the sinner, and God's willingness to give in reality that which he has given in symbol and ceremony; and therefore all the ordinances of the church are appointed by that power which they signify. If God did

not give the power to have a real purgation, while he gave the outward symbol of a ceremonial purgation, there would be no room for such an objurgation as is given here, "Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, I will cause my fury to rest upon thee." In being admitted therefore into the Church of Christ, in submitting for that purpose to the ordinance of baptism, scripture declares it to be the washing away of sins. But when we compare it with these other passages of scripture, we see that it is a ceremonial washing away of sins, and not a real one. The reality of it depends upon the use we make of it, upon the submission to that grace which ever accompanies the pardon;—that as the infant expands in his faculties of mind and heart and body, if he submit to that grace which is given him at baptism, being then ceremonially cleansed, believing he is actually cleansed in the moral process of divine dealing towards him; that being pardoned at his beginning by a probationary pardon, he is finally pardoned and accepted, and blessed, if he manifest the power of that grace in the submission of his heart to the teaching, to the cleansing, to the power of God's Holy Spirit.

3. Now in the exercise of pardon it seems inconsistent to believe in pardon and yet ask for it, to stand up in the "Creed" and declare that we believe in the forgiveness of sins, and every time we kneel down upon our knees to ask afresh for pardon. But there is really nothing inconsistent in this. It is because we believe in God's general pardon towards us that we ask his special pardon. It is because we do not doubt of God's love to us, that we willingly come back from hour to hour to ask the impress of his pardon at every time that we come into his presence; for we in all things offend inasmuch as

in us, that is in our flesh, there dwelleth no good thing. We are continually coming short of the requirements of the divine law, and therefore have a continual need to express our sense of our short-coming and sin, and ask him to forgive us. That is not to change his mind towards us, for he is unchangeable, but to change his providence towards us and not to inflict the chastisements to which our sins require, or would require for want of his grace, but to exercise towards us the cleansing power of his own spirit, the result of the pardoning condition of his own mind. In the enjoyment of that pardon we have its lower sense, and its full, and final, and blessed sense. In the lower sense of pardon it is a most important thing to take a right view of ourselves as baptized. There is an expression on the part of God in Christ exactly similar to what our Saviour says here,—the king freely forgave him the ten thousand talents. The very fact of having been brought into the church, of being borne with in the midst of our sins, of being dealt with in the pleadings of the outward preacher, and the inward voice of God; all this is the expression to us of the pardoning mind of God. It is a real deliverance so long as it lasts. Is it no deliverance to be out of hell? Is it no deliverance to be saved from present torment, and dealt with in present bounty, and having our hearts fed with food and gladness? Is it no salvation that we are here this day in the house of God, hearing the word of God, and feeling the pleading of God's spirit in our own minds? Is it no salvation to us that we have thus the long suffering of God leading us to repentance? Peter answers the question to us when he says in the 3rd chap. of the 2nd Epistle, and the 15th verse, "an account that the long suffering of our Lord is salvation."

Here is the state of soul spoken of in the catechism, that lower sense of pardon, of grace, and of blessing which belongs alike to every baptized human being, enjoyed, we may say, by every one of them; that believe respecting them in one baptism for the remissions of sins. Yet it is but that probationary pardon of which our blessed Saviour speaks here; a pardon that may well bring comfort even to the heart of the sinner. It assures him that he who gave the less is willing to give the greater if we will only come to him with the grace of faith, and hope, and love. That he gave us the less is a pledge and assurance of his more than willingness to give the greater. Thus in that ordinance he says to us, "As I live saith the Lord I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, wherefore turn you yourselves and live ye." And there is that higher pardon, of which baptismal cleansing is but the sign of which the baptismal gift of the spirit is salvation. God speaking to the soul is one thing, God renewing the soul is another, God declaring his willingness to receive the sinner, following him with the pleading of his spirit is one thing, that sinners heart renewed by divine grace is another. Here we have indeed the lower one as a platform upon which we may stand in order to ascend to the higher one, in which we may say, he that received us by baptism into his church will doubtless receive us by the power of baptism into his church above. He who gave us his Son to procure for us the temporary probationary grace of the present time, is more than willing to give us the eternal, the unchanging grace that he has promised to them that ask him. Here is the final and full blessedness of the true and real pardon of which the Apostle says, "having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood

of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having a High Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

III. This leads me finally to consider, the privileges, responsibilities and duties resulting from that pardon. 1, our privileges towards the pardon that we need not be afraid that sin will hinder his blessing us; for it was our sin that made him give us Christ. Our privileges towards the Son that we need not be afraid that our sins will hinder his pleading for us, because it is for our sins that he pleads, that our sin may not be punished but cleansed. Our privileges towards the spirit that we may not be afraid that our unholiness will drive away that spirit; it is because we are unholy he was sent down to make us holy, to make us fit for heaven. In this respect therefore even in that probationary pardon, we have exceeding great and precious privileges in our relations towards God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

2. We have corresponding responsibilities as our Saviour says, "so likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

3. We have corresponding duties resulting from these duties. The duty of an unchanging faith and reliance upon the father's love, upon the Son's pleading, upon the Spirit's power. And our duties resulting towards each other, "if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." We may be assured that that grace of God which communicates qua-

lities to us: diffuses these qualities from us. He who has received pardon, bestows pardon; he who has in reality received it, not who has not merely heard it, but who has submitted to its power. The mirror that receives the light reflects that light. The vessel that receives the water flowing from the fountain, pours out the overflowing of that water. And the soul that receives the light of God's truth, will reflect the light of that truth around. He that receives the power of God's spirit will diffuse the gracious influences of that spirit upon those around, so that the pardoned soul is a pardoning soul; and the unpardoning soul is one that has not received real pardon. That manner in which we act to those around us is proof of the manner in which we have submitted to the corresponding relationship of God towards us. It is this that Christ meant, not that there is any merit in our pardoning to procure pardon from God. He that has rested upon God's pardoning love will exercise man's pardoning love to those around; and he who does not exercise that pardoning love, has not himself received, that is, not believed in the pardoning love of God to him.

Let us think what it is we expect from God with respect to our own pardon. Let us think what God does towards us with respect to that pardon. Let us think of the fulness and freeness of his offered mercy; of the riches of his bestowed gifts to the unfaithful and the heathen; and then pray that we may have grace to go and do likewise, and that which he is towards us we may be in our measure to others, and that we being ourselves forgiven, much we may readily more than willingly forgive much, to the praise and glory of God.

Oh, brethren, are there any here who have not sub-

mitted to, who do not believe in, that real, true, full, final pardon, through God in Christ? Remember his own words, "as I live saith the Lord I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth but rather that the wicked should return and repent, wherefore turn yourselves and live ye. Let it be our watchfulness to see that our conduct towards those around, is the result, as it may be the image, of our submission to the corresponding relationship of God; that we may be seen and known of all men as being ourselves pardoned and cleansed spirits, because we are seen and known of all men as forgiving and forbearing towards all those around us.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XIV.

LABOURER IN THE VINEYARD.

ST. MATTHEW, XX., V. 1.—"*For the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.*"

Many a man was engaged in building Noah's Ark who never entered into that ark, but was drowned. Many a Prophet from Balaam to Judas spoke with evangelical truth of the person and works of Christ, who spoke by the power of the Spirit, and yet never submitted his heart to the grace of that Spirit, and so was damned. Many a preacher of the Gospel from Judas to the present hour has been a heaven-sent messenger and Apostle of Christ, has proclaimed that Gospel by divine commission to others, and yet never himself submitted to the power of that Holy Gospel. And this is one of the great truths intended by our blessed Saviour to be taught to us in this parable: an awful truth in many aspects, with which many have greatly puzzled themselves; some denying that men can be ministers of Christ who are not themselves converted men: some thinking that men must necessarily be converted men because they are doing

the work of Christ's vineyard in the world. But both of these classes are rebuked by the parable which our blessed Saviour gives us here of the labourer in the vineyard. Some have applied it to the Jews and the Gentiles; as if our Lord meant to show that the Gentile that was called but at the eleventh hour was accepted, while the Jew who had been previously called was rejected. But the parable in no degree suits that interpretation; for no fault is found with the work of the men who were engaged in that vineyard. The steward assembles them all, and gives them all their wages, and so tacitly approves of the work of them all. Now that would not apply to the Jew as being rejected, and the Gentile as being received; neither would it apply to the various times at which they were here called; for if it were merely Jew and Gentile, it would mention the calling of some labourers and the rejection of their work; and then the calling of others, and the acceptance of theirs. Others apply the parable to the conversion of the soul, and the eleventh hour has passed almost into a proverb, intimating that he who trusts to God even at the last hour of his life with repentance and faith will be saved. It is indeed a blessed truth that he who turns even his dying eyes with repentance and faith to that Saviour who hung upon the cross, will be received. But this is not the truth that is taught here, for the circumstances of the parable do not suit this application. If this application be true, it would follow that the man who was converted to God in the last hour of his life would be in a holier and better state than the man who early in life entered by conver[illegible] heart int[illegible] ministral service of the Saviour; [illegible] whole life as a c[illegible]

ed in vain, and to him might be applicable the dark side of that declaration, "Many be called but few chosen." The application therefore of the parable to conversion, or to the Jew and Gentile is a false application. We have the real application of it in our Saviour's own words, that it is intended to set before us this fearful truth: that a person may be employed by Christ himself in his vineyard in this world, and may labour in that vineyard without any fault being found with his work, and yet have his heart entirely unfit for the heavenly dwelling place, and be at last amongst those who are rejected instead of received.

The circumstance under which the parable was delivered gives a two-fold aspect to the lesson intended to be taught us by our Saviour; he had been speaking of the impossibility of rich men entering into the Kingdom of Heaven; that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. Peter naturally concluded from this that the Apostles at least were very safe from that danger; well, we have left all and followed thee; if it be so very dangerous to be rich, we are not in that danger, for we are become poor for thy sake; well, we have left all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore? There were twelve men who had thus literally left all to follow Jesus; they had left homes and home [illegible] were for his sake dependent upon the alms of [illegible] they for his sake had given up the [illegible] dwelling place; they had literally followed [illegible] had walked about with Jesus keeping [illegible] all in his authority [illegible] followed him etc.

the work of Christ's vineyard in the world. But both of these classes are rebuked by the parable which our blessed Saviour gives us here of the labourer in the vineyard. Some have applied it to the Jews and the Gentiles; as if our Lord meant to show that the Gentile that was called but at the eleventh hour was accepted, while the Jew who had been previously called was rejected. But the parable in no degree suits that interpretation; for no fault is found with the work of the men who were engaged in that vineyard. The steward assembles them all, and gives them all their wages, and so tacitly approves of the work of them all. Now that would not apply to the Jew as being rejected, and the Gentile as being received; neither would it apply to the various times at which they were here called; for if it were merely Jew and Gentile, it would mention the calling of some labourers and the rejection of their work; and then the calling of others, and the acceptance of theirs. Others apply the parable to the conversion of the soul, and the eleventh hour has passed almost into a proverb, intimating that he who trusts to God even at the last hour of his life with repentance and faith will be saved. It is indeed a blessed truth that he who turns even his dying eyes with repentance and faith to that Saviour who hung upon the cross, will be received. But this is not the truth that is taught here, for the circumstances of the parable do not suit this application. If this application be true, it would follow that the man who was converted to God in the last hour of his life would be in a holier and better state than the man who early in life entered by conversion of heart into the spiritual service of the Saviour; and that a man although spending his whole life as a converted man, might have lived and learn-

ed in vain, and to him might be applicable the dark side of that declaration, "Many be called but few chosen." The application therefore of the parable to conversion, or to the Jew and Gentile is a false application. We have the real application of it in our Saviour's own words, that it is intended to set before us this fearful truth: that a person may be employed by Christ himself in his vineyard in this world, and may labour in that vineyard without any fault being found with his work, and yet have his heart entirely unfit for the heavenly dwelling place, and be at last amongst those who are rejected instead of received.

The circumstance under which the parable was delivered gives a two-fold aspect to the lesson intended to be taught us by our Saviour; he had been speaking of the impossibility of rich men entering into the Kingdom of Heaven; that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. Peter naturally concluded from this that the Apostles at least were very safe from that danger; well, we have left all and followed thee; if it be so very dangerous to be rich, we are not in that danger, for we are become poor for thy sake; well, we have left all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore? There were twelve men who had thus literally left all to follow Jesus; they had left house and home, and trade, and walked about the world with him. They were for his sake dependant upon the alms of others; they for his sake had given up the comforts of a settled dwelling place; they had literally followed, that is, they had walked about with Jesus, keeping company with him in his poverty and in his suffering. Amongst these twelve was that one who followed him with an unconvert-

ed heart, and with an unholy mind; and Christ could not see twelve men before him thus engaged in his service, thus obedient to his outward command, and not warn them that the mere following of him, that the becoming poor for his sake was no certain test of their final acceptance. "Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the son of man shall sit upon the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The emphatic word there is *followed*. Judas had not followed Jesus; he had followed his earthly hopes, he had followed his ambition which made him long to be one of the chief ministers of Messiah, whom he expected to sit upon the throne of David. He had faith enough in the prophecies of the bible, to believe in their earthly fulfilment; but he had not discernment enough to look for their heavenly character. He could, through his faith in the bible, his belief in revelation, his trust in the earthly promise of God, surrender all that he had in this world, and carry the bag that received the alms upon which Jesus and his disciples lived; he could do all this through his trust in the earthly promises of God, and yet he did not follow Jesus, and he never will sit upon the throne of his glory with him. He had his earthly reward but he had no heavenly inheritance. See with what emphasis he uses that word, "Ye which have *followed* me." It is only those who follow the heavenly path described that shall be chosen, when Christ shall come. In answer further to what Peter had asked, Jesus said, Every one that had forsaken houses, or brother, or sister, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my names sake. shall receive a hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life." In the parrallel passages in the other gospels it is written, "Ye

shall receive a hundred fold in this life, and in the world to come life eternal." There is therefore a two-fold fulfilment of the promise given by our Saviour; the one the wages that belong to this life; the other the blessedness that belongs to the life that is to come. And it is with reference to this second part that he gives the solemn injunction, but many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first; the meaning of which follows in the explanation or winding up of this parable, "The first shall be last, and the last first; for many are called but few chosen."

Now it is to set this two-fold truth before us that our Lord gives us here the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. "For the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is an householder which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard; and when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? And they say unto him because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, go ye also into the vineyard and whatsoever is right that shall ye receive." Here then is one of the ordinary occurrences of the business of life; early in the morning, as soon as it was light, the owner of the vineyard goes out into the common market-place and finds men, even at that early hour, looking for employment. He selects as many as he wants, and sends them

into his vineyard. Now with regard to merit, there was no claim of gratitude either on the one side or the other. The owner of the vineyard did not employ these men for any benevolence to them, it was that his vineyard needed dressing. The men did not go into the market place for any benevolence towards the owner of the vineyard, their families needed support, it was the ordinary necessities of life that took them into the market place, and took the owner of the vineyard there to seek them. It was therefore simply a matter of employment, of labour, on one side, and of wages on the other. Three hours after he needs other labourers, and finds men still waiting in the same market place, looking for employment; he employs as many as he needs; but leaves those that were in the market place, that he did not need, unemployed. Three hours after he goes and does the same. Three hours after he repeats the same visit to the market place, and the men who had remained there from the morning light to the ninth hour assuredly showed a great anxiety for employment; although they showed neither love nor otherwise towards the owner of the vineyard. It was simply the necessities of life, and the industry of life which these men exhibited. At the eleventh hour, within one hour of the close of the day the owner of the vineyard goes into the market place and employs other labourers. He asks them "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" and the answer which they gave was a full vindication of their apparent idleness, "No man hath hired us." There could be no rebuke upon them for their idleness, for there they were waiting. There was indeed on the contrary very great praise due to them for their earnest anxiety to find employment. Had they not longed for this employment they would not have remain-

ed until it was almost hopeless to find it. Disappointed at the third hour, disappointed at the sixth hour, disappointed at the ninth hour, they might well have gone home and said "As no man hath hired us in the first part of the day we are not likely to find any one to employ us the last quarter of the day," and they might well have gone home; but there was that necessity of life which made them wait in anxious hope, and so at the eleventh hour they were found there still earnest, to be employed. If there were to be any merit in looking for employment, surely those who remained in the market place during the whole day for eleven hours, hoping and wishing to be employed would be the best instead of the worst. So that in no respect does it suit the character of unconverted persons sinfully remaining out of the Lord's service; but it well suits the character of those who cannot go into the vineyard until the owner of the vineyard sends for them.

If we apply this to the work of Christ he also has his vineyard in this world; "The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant plant." Now the parable does not bring before us the view of the men that compose the vineyard, but the labourers who take care of the vineyard. It sets before us those who are employed in the ministries of the church, of whatever kind those ministries may be, but not the church itself as a people. It teaches us the very important truth that no man can enter into the service of Christ in the church except called by Christ. What a blessed example does our blessed Lord himself show of this in his own person. The Apostle says in the 5th chap. of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "No man taketh this honor unto himself but he that is called of God as was Aaron; so also Christ glorified not himself

to be made a high priest, but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." We may wish for employment in the Church of Christ; we may ask for it; we may be found as it were in the market-place putting ourselves in the way of being employed; but it is he that must come into that market-place and must say, "Go, work in my vineyard;" and it is he who is the great Lord of Heaven and Earth, that has an eye to the services of the sinner as well as the saint, who can and does employ the unconverted as well as the converted; like those unclean birds that were sent of God to feed the prophet in the desert; thus unclean and yet feeding with clean food him who was the prisoner of the Lord. The labourers then are represented as doing their work during the whole of the time they were employed by the master of the vineyard. "But when the evening was come the Lord of the vineyard said unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more: and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong; did'st thou not agree with me for a penny, Take what thine is and go thy way; I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil because I am good?" [Here we have no fault found with the work of the men. The master of the vineyard is there, the

steward is there, the wages are paid, there is no scrutiny of the work; the men are not represented as being dismissed from employment; but simply this, the labourers are called up and paid, which implies that their work was accepted. There was one class who had a claim of right to a penny; there was another class who had a claim of right only to the twelfth part of a penny, and yet they received a penny. Neither class received more than a day's wages for a day's work. In the interpretation therefore of the parable it is not set before us heaven, or the blessedness of heaven; but earth and the wages of earth, in the service of Christ in his church on earth. In the one class we have as I have said that which was earned and was justly due, and there is this in the Church of Christ, the Lord hath ordained that they that preach the gospel should live of the gospel. If we have our temporal wants and the great head of the church call upon us with all these human wants about us, to separate ourselves from our ordinary business in life, and to give ourselves up to his service in the church, there is a claim for actual work performed, upon him who so employs his ministers in the church. In this respect we may reverentially say it is a work of merit, that is, it is something really earned and so Christ represents it here. For, if we have a right to labour for our daily bread, and God has promised that in the sweat of thy brow thou shall eat bread; he whom God calls and Christ calls, to set himself apart, to give himself up from his ordinary labour, to labour for him in his church, he offers not heaven but all his daily wages. So the Apostle Paul says, quoting the words of our Saviour and master in the 5th chap. of Timothy, and the 17th & 18th verses, "Let the elders that rule well be considered worthy of double honour: especially they who labour in

the word and doctrine; for the scripture saith thou shall not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And the labourer is worthy of his reward." Now the scripture that saith the labourer is worthy of his reward, is the 10th chap. of St. Luke, and the 7th verse, where our Saviour is speaking not of ordinary labours, but of those who laboured in the preaching of his gospel. He says, "In the same house remain eating and drinking such things as they give; for the labourer is worthy of his hire, go not from house to house." The wages therefore spoken of here is food and clothing, "The labourer is worthy of his hire," he earns it. The man who labours but one hour stands upon somewhat of another claim of justice for a day's wages for a day's work. There was a claim of compassion for a day's wages for a day's work. The poor men who had remained eleven hours waiting for work had no claim in justice upon the owner of the vineyard; but when the twelfth hour had come and these poor men stood before that owner of the vineyard, and he a rich man, and they poor men; men with familes, who had the wants of a family, who had patiently waited in the market-place until they were called to labour: they were going home to their families with a day's wants. But he who had a bountiful eye looked upon their wants, and that which they could not claim from his justice they did obtain from his compassion. "He gave every man a penny." It does not at all say that these men of the eleventh hour were in the least degree better than the men who were taken early in the morning; for that is not the purpose of the parable. It simply shows us that the present life is a dispensation of God's justice and kindness towards all men in this world; and he who is employed but a short time in the service of God may be assured that his daily wants shall

be supplied by him who said, "Bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure." And here then, he who is longing, wishing to be employed in his master's service may be quite sure that they also are his servants who stand and wait; and that we are not to measure our fitness for heaven by the quantity of our work; nor our unfitness for heaven by the shortness of our employment in the public work of the Church of Christ; that this is a thing not depending upon the human will but upon the divine. It is therefore no measure of human character, but only the exhibition to us of the will of Christ who is head over all things to his church.

In the application of this part of the parable it is indeed a great comfort to those whose hearts are given to their Saviour, and who long to do something for him, and who feel that the highest and holiest privileges of man on earth is to do and to suffer for him who died and suffered so much for us. But we are to wait upon him, that when he sends we should go, and that when he is silent we should wait. "No man taketh this honour unto himself but he that is called of God as was Aaron;" and if he be long silent we shall be long waiting; ever ready to go at whatever moment it pleases our Heavenly Maker to send us: and assured that in going to his work we shall have the daily supply of our wants, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Now let us take the second application of the parable, given to us by our blessed Saviour. "So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called but few chosen." There was an acceptance of some on the part of the owner of the vineyard, and a rejection of others on the part of the same man. "Is thine eye evil because I am good?" Oh, what a reverse there will be in the expectations of many at the last day, when they who have

patience of hope, and diligence of service in the world around. We may have great work in the vineyards and have little love in our hearts; but we cannot have great love in our hearts without a great and earnest desire for work in the vineyard. If we have that earnest desire it will manifest itself in what we are really doing in life. We may not be employed officially in the vineyard as here described to us; but we shall be able to do our own work in the world as no common men. We shall be able to spiritualize that which is secular, and to make heavenly that which is otherwise earthly. We shall hold forth the word of life, blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. These are the few that are chosen; the whole world are the many that are called.

Brethren, let us pray that such a lesson as this may be deeply impressed upon our hearts and minds. Let us never forget the danger that there is of being employed in the vineyard of Christ on earth; doing great work for him; bringing many souls to him, and yet being ourselves far from him, bearing food to others, and being ourselves unfed; bringing Christ to others, and being Christless ourselves. On the other hand let us not be discouraged or dejected because Christ does not give us much public work to do in his church; because it is not that which makes those accepted who are chosen at last. It is he who does the work that is given him with a faithful heart and willing mind, and who whether he is publicly working, or whether he is publicly laid aside from work, is equally loving the person and trusting in the love and mercy of God; longing for the coming of the Saviour; it is he, that will be found at the last day amongst the accepted ones unto whom Christ will say, "Come ye blessed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XV.

THE TWO SONS.

ST. MATTHEW, xxi., v. 28—32.—"*But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go sir, and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, the first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him; and, ye when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards, that ye might believe him.*"

This was the first of those most instructive parables spoken by our blessed Lord on the last six days of his ministry. A very remarkable change came over his public conduct during that week. Before-time he had retired as much as possible from public gaze. We frequently find him saying when he had performed some miracle of mercy, "See thou tell no man." We find him

straightly charging his disciples that they should not tell any one that he was Christ. But here he reverses his conduct. He had ridden into Jerusalem, presenting himself with that expressive symbolical action of riding upon an ass, as the Prince of Peace; not upon the horse of war, that he might take possession of his kingdom by force; but as the Prince of Peace, saying to Jerusalem, "Behold thy king cometh unto thee, lowly and riding upon an ass." He entered into the temple, and assumed authority in and over the temple, driving out the money-changers, and assuming the power to cleanse it. The Scribes and the Pharisees, the men in authority, had come to him, and asked him, By what authority doest thou these things? They had a right to ask that question, because they had a divine care of the temple. But they should have been in a fit state to ask it. Jesus publicly convicted them of ignorance, and he did so in such a way as they could not take hold on his words, for he extorted the confession from their own mouths. If they questioned him as to his authority, which they had a right to do, it was their duty to have questioned John the Baptist about his. Jesus therefore asked them, was John's baptism from Heaven or of men? They confessed that they could not tell; not that they had no opinion about him, but they dared not tell. They had rejected the message of John after the people had accepted that message, and therefore they, to avoid an apparently greater danger, confessed their ignorance and said, we cannot tell. Our Lord therefore convicted them out of their own mouths of inability to tell whether a man professing to be from God was from God or not. If they were unable in the one case, they might be unable in the other, and therefore he says to them,

"Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

To illustrate their real position he gave them the parable which I have just read. They assumed authority in the temple over the Lord's people; they took to themselves the credit of being especially the favoured ones; especially the righteous ones; those that were doing God's service, and had the care of God's house. They despised the publicans and the harlots, yea even the common people. Christ gives them this parable. A certain man had two sons, and the one was asked to do his father's work; and refused, with disrespect to his father, but he afterwards went and did it. The other promised, and respectfully promised, for we find the compellation sir here, I go sir, but having made that promise he went not. Again our Lord convicts them out of their own mouths, by asking Whether of them twain did the will of his father? The one that in words refused, and afterwards felt his sin, and went and did the work, or the one who in words promised, and afterwards did not perform that promise. They answered, The one that did the work. Jesus said, "The Publicans and the Harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you." The two sons here do not refer to the Jew and Gentile, but to two classes amongst the same people. In this we have no reasonable hesitation, because our Lord himself defines the two classes. The Publicans and the Harlots are one class; and the Scribes and the Pharisees are the other. They had already marked out their own characters with regard to John the Baptist. The Publicans and the Harlots had heard the words of John, and had obeyed them; many of them repented, and went and did their Heavenly Father's work. The Scribes and the Pharisees heard

the same words, but heeded them not, they did not repent, and they did not do their Heavenly Father's work. Jesus said, John came unto you with the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the Publicans and the Harlots believed him, and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards, that ye might believe. They were especially the preachers of righteousness; they could tithe, mint, anise, and cummin, and appear beautiful outwardly to man; they could be very strict in the letter of the law of God, and yet they were not in the way of righteousness. A preacher of real righteousness came and they did not hear him. That which is imitation cannot amalgamate with that which is reality—the one is empty,—the other is solid,—the one is only in appearance,—the other is in reality. Here were two preachers of righteousness in the kingdom at the same time,—the Pharisaic preacher of righteousness, very strict in outward observances,—the Divine messenger of righteousness, who stood, a messenger of God, suddenly appearing from the desert, clothed as he was in a raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; unaccompanied by any miracles, for his message needed no miraculous attestation. It was a message that had already a witness in the conscience of every man, and all he needed was to stand in the midst of that people, and cry, Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand! The righteousness of John the Baptist began at the right end, Repent! That is not, do penance; but, change your mind. If you would be really righteous, change your minds, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; change your minds for the Prince of Peace and Holiness is coming.—Repent! It was a terrible voice that went into the conscience of every man; that for a time

brought down some of the Pharisees and the Sadducees to his baptism, coming along with the Publicans and Harlots to the preacher of true righteousness that they might submit to his baptism. That terrible voice, had its response also in the Pharisee's conscience for a little while; yet it was only a superficial admission that it gained there They did indeed listen for a while; they said I go sir; but they did not do the work given to them by their Heavenly Father. They heard the word for a little while; but they were men who were righteous in their own eyes, and therefore they knew not the need of the righteousness that begins at repentance, and goes on to the production of fruits meet for repentance. Therefore they formed the class of character of which our Saviour speaks here in the 32nd verse, saying, "For John came in the way of righteousness," but they who thought themselves especially the guardians of salvation, uprightness, and righteousness, believed him not; they rejected the counsel of God against themselves, and they did not do that which this divinely commissioned messenger called upon them to do; they rejected that counsel to their own ruin. Now the Publicans and the Harlots were in a different state, they were not preachers of righteousness, nor practisers of righteousness. They could not deceive themselves with an imitation of religion, for they had not made a profession of religion. They were extortioners, and unjust, and adulterers, and therefore their consciences could not deceive them. They might indeed live in a dormant state of conscience for a while, they might live in a careless state for a while; they might live in forgetfulness of God, and in the breach of his commandments; but it could only be the lull of a false calm; it could only be the voice of a slug-

gish quiet, until they heard the voice of God's messenger. When that awful word, Repent! struck into their consciences, it roused up that voice of God within, and opened up their inward ear to the voice of God, which to their eternal blessedness was not closed again, though they had for a long time resisted that voice, and with a high hand, and with disrespectful mouth, had said "our lips are our own, who is Lord over us?" Yet they did repent, and did trouble themselves; they listened to the voice of God's messenger, to the preacher of true righteousness; they went and did their Heavenly Father's will; their hearts were prepared to receive the Son of that Heavenly Father when he came. "The Publicans and Harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you."

Here was that parable which Jesus delivered on this day of his last public ministry. There were two classes of people before him, the one sinners, but repentant sinners; the other sinners also, but self-righteous sinners; the one making their own good works a wall of separation between them and the sin-cleansing Saviour; the other bringing all their bad works to the fountain of their Saviour's blood; washing them out in his atonement, and accepting his offer of mercy, they enter with him into the Kingdom of Heaven.

There is a solemn lesson to ourselves brethren here. There is still the imitation righteousness, and the real righteousness. There is still the service of God that does not begin at repentance, and there is the service of God that does begin at repentance. There is that state of mind in which men by way of reformation can multiply their religious services, and make many good resolutions; may increase the number of their external ordinances,

and be not only no nearer but further from the Kingdom of God. And there is that state of mind in which the conscience being aroused, and the heart humbled, and the lips confessing sin, and feeling oneself utterly fallen, prostrates himself at the footstool of the divine mercy, and turns away from the evil of his ways and changing his heart; submissive to the power of divine grace and love, he enters into the true Kingdom of God, and the sinner becomes fitted and ripened for the final Kingdom of Glory.

Now we must be aware here of a very common and fatal error, as if there were something better in being for a while wicked; as if wickedness had any thing in its own nature that could fit us for the Kingdom of God. This is indeed a most dangerous error, by no means intended to be taught by our Lord here. It is true that the Publican and the Harlot, the vile and the profligate, are nearer to the Kingdom of God than the self-righteous. But our Lord is not here contrasting the profligate with the truly religious; but the profligate with the unconverted man who has the form of godliness; with the man who has mistaken his outward ordinances for religion; and not with the real, earnest seeker of God, who from his youth upwards has walked in those ways which are ways of pleasantness, and those paths which are paths of peace.

We have to consider why the Publican and the Harlot are nearer to the Kingdom of God than the others. It is simply this, he has no danger of a self-deceived conscience. He may for awhile deceive himself while he is walking in darkness, for the man who is living in sin does not see and does not know the depth of his sin, or the true nature of corruption. But there is an hour coming when

God's voice comes into his conscience and that conscience responsive to the voice of God makes him feel how he has came short of the Glory of God; how deep have been his corruptions; how heavy his guilt. The reason why he is more ready to receive the preacher of the gospel is only that he has no deceived conscience to make him build up a hope in his self-righteousness. If he think of Heaven, he must feel his own unholiness; if he think of merit he must feel his own demerit; if he hope for salvation, it cannot be in his holiness or his purity; and therefore in this respect and in this manner is he nearer to the Kingdom of God; is he more likely to listen to the teaching and warning of the messenger of God. When we come to the other, not converted to a pious heart, but to one who has the outward form of religion, who has been outwardly like a whited sepulchre beautiful and fair, but inwardly full of corruption and excess; he may not have been conscious to himself of the nature of his guilt. If we read the ten commandments in his ears, he may say with the young man, "All these have I kept from my youth up;" he may imagine himself not very deeply guilty of the breach of any one of them, and because he has lived with a certain kind of attention, and in some respects with a scrupulous attention, to the duties of religion as well as of life, forgetful of the state of his heart; attentive only to the forms of religion, and the practice of moral duties; he is not so likely to be aroused in his conscience, he is more likely to turn away from the humbling doctrines of the cross. If the preacher of righteousness come to him and tell him, All your good works are as filthy rags, all your fancied holiness is an abomination in God's sight; all this outward form of religion has been without the inner

power of heaven's holiness, it is utterly worthless; he is not prepared to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; he is not ready to believe himself in this way a hell deserving sinner before God; he will not listen to the voice that thus speaks of humiliation and repentance to him, he turns away, and though it be the Son of God that speaks, and though it be miraculous powers that attest the credibilities of his teaching, all is nothing to him, he does not feel his need; he does not see his state, he thinks himself safe, and he wraps himself up in the garments of his own formalities, which his own folly has woven for him, and he will not put on that only wedding garment which can make him meet for the Saviour's presence.

There is also another important lesson taught us here; and that is, There is no reason why we should continue in sin, because we have refused to listen to the message which our Heavenly Father has sent to us. Jesus represents them here as not only not doing the work of God, but as refusing to do it. His Father said to him, go work to-day in my vineyard; and he speaks to him with the tenderness of a father's care, "Son go work to-day in my vineyard," and he answers that father's paternal words with disrespect, and refuses, "I will not." He might naturally have said to himself, "well, I have refused to obey my father, and now he will not receive me into favour, he will not employ me in his service, there is no hope of acceptance from him." He did not say so, on the contrary, he afterwards repented and went. Oh what comforting words are these from our Saviour's lips; how soothing they are to the awakened conscience; how do they set before us the long-suffering and goodness, the tender love of him who as a father pitieth his children,

so doth the Lord pity them that fear Him, them that hope in his mercy. There are seasons when an awakened conscience remembers the warning voice of God that had been for how long unheard, the tenderness of expostulation that had been so long unheeded: at those times the heart is in danger of being unduly depressed, and the spirits unscripturally dejected; the time past of life seems such a sea of corruption, such a season of darkness, such an accumulation of guilt, that the heart is ready to sink under the prospect and the load, and to say, There is no hope for me, I have sinned against light and against knowledge, I have trampled under foot the Son of God himself, I have done despite unto the Spirit of grace, and now there is no hope, no more offering for sin. But here we have our Saviour's own words, those who had become Publicans and Harlots, had repented and returned, but yet were received into that kingdom. "The Publicans and the Harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you." On the other hand we have here those who make good resolutions, who make solemn promises to God, who do so respectfully, "I go sir," and taking these resolutions as if they were performances, as though they had in the *profession* of religion fulfilled the *duties* of religion; or in their outward observances have been what they ought to be to recommend them to God; they hear the real message of righteousness, the terrible sounds that speak of God, of the need of repentance, they hear the warning voice of the Saviour's own words and life, and yet they do not do that which they had promised to do; they turn aside from the work of the vineyard, and they choose their own work. Oh, how many are fulfilling the proverb that has been formed from but too great and bitter experience, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." Many

intending to do God's work and making the promise, but putting it off to the morrow that never comes, saying "I go sir," and they go not. Are we to take this as doing the work of our Heavenly Father, or are we to believe this to be that which will recommend us to Christ?

Now when our Saviour gave such a parable as this, he did not, as I have already hinted, intend to include all classes of men; he applied it to the self-righteous on one side, and to the sinner that subsequently repented on the other. But there is another large class of men, not indeed as large as they ought to be, who are not included in this parable, and that is those who hear that voice, and hearing it obey it from their youth; there are those who, like John the Baptist, have been filled with the Holy Ghost from their mother's womb; who, like Timothy, have from a child known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus; who can look back to the domestic scene with a grandmother who had the living faith of Christ in her heart, and the mother who took the infant child into her lap, and with lisping accents, taught him to speak the name of Christ, and to call upon the name of God, who, from their youth have been taught to submit to divine grace, and are taught even in comparative infancy to do so. These are a class far more blessed than either that are spoken of here, who walk in the ways of holiness from their earliest years, have never sunk down to the degradation of the immoral and profane, or never put on the outward form of unrepentant religion. It is indeed a class, however small, that may be, and that ought to be the object of the imitation of every youthful heart, and if there be youthful hearts here who have the world before them, who have the

choice to make, the opportunity of making a good choice, of choosing in early life the narrow path, painful it may be, self-restraining it must be, and yet holy and in companionship with Jesus, there is an opportunity given to such of choosing those ways which are ways of pleasantness, and walking in those paths whose promise and whose end is peace. They may walk with him from their youth, may not turn aside from that which is good; from a child clinging to the Holy Scriptures, and clinging to that Saviour to whom these Scriptures point; walking with him in youthful holiness and continuing with him in full grown maturity, may finally attain to a height of blessedness, to a beauty of holiness, to an accuracy in the Saviour's image, which shall indeed outshine those whe are delivered from the depths of sin and degradation, or those who are rescued from the errors of self-righteousness, and those are most acceptable to a Saviour's bosom and a Saviour's love.

Brethren, let it be our prayer that we may each one of us avoid the dangers and embrace the comforts brought before us here. If there be those who must look back to seasons, if not years, of profligacy, let them take the comfort that is here, "The Publicans and the Harlots go into the Kingdom of God." If there be those who have been once self-righteous, who have put on religion without beginning at repentance, remember, there was one as self-righteous as any of you could be, who, if any man might trust in the flesh *he* might more, conforming to the services of religion, and attentive to all its divinely appointed ordinances, and yet learned to cast it all away, who could say, "What things were gain to me I count loss for Christ, yea doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus

my Lord." And may my youthful hearers this evening be strengthened in the holy resolution, that before they have had time to fall into the grosser corruptions, before they have had time to defile themselves with the dark deeds of sin, they may determine to set their faces Zionward. to choose their Saviour in their early days, to seek to him with the spirit of repentance, with grace and supplication, that they may go on their way walking with him, placing youthful hands in his hands, resting youthful arms upon his arms, giving youthful hearts to his heart, being guided from their youth upwards in his counsels and his love, that they may, in their dying day, be received into his blessedness and glory.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XVI.

THE HOUSEHOLDER & THE HUSBANDMEN.

St. Matthew, chap. xxi., 43 v.—"*Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*"

Mercy and judgment are most closely connected together; love and jealousy are inseparable companions; they are in the nature of things joined together. Our blessed Saviour was the very incarnation of the divine mercy, and yet from his lips proceeded the warning voice of the terror of the divine judgment. It is a solemn reflection to think that we are in a probationary state, a state of trial, upon the issue of which depends eternal interests. Our Lord had come to offer mercy to the Jewish people; he was now choosing his ministry; he stood before the rulers and teachers of the Jewish people; no longer does he plead with its rulers as he once was willing to do; his voice is now changed to the voice of solemn judgment, and he tells them "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." They had as rulers passed their day of grace, the time had gone by when they could have received Jesus as their King

shipping; a priesthood to instruct the people in the law of their God. He had given them the secret teaching of his Spirit, accompanying the public teaching of his church; and therefore what God did for them was to make them a vineyard, to remove obstructions out of the way; to give them all those ordinances which were calculated to make them meet for the service of God.

2. Now what did God expect from that church? He looked unto them that they should bring forth grapes: that they should bring forth pure fruits. He sent his messengers to demand from that vineyard, from the keeper of that vineyard, the fruits in due season. Christ tells us how these messengers were received. "The husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did unto them likewise. And last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, they will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, this is the heir, come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance; and they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him."

It is very important to the right understanding of this parable that we should consider what were the fruits which those prophets demanded in the name of God. We see what they were not. Exact obedience to ritual ordinances were not the saving fruits that were expected; nor was great boasting of their ecclesiastical privileges the expected fruits that the ministers of God, his prophets demanded. They looked for these, but they also demanded far more than these, Judgment, Mercy, and Faith. If we turn to this 5th chap. of Isaiah, we shall see there what were the wicked fruits they brought forth, in

contrast with the good ones that should have been exhibited; in the 7th verse "He looked for judgment, but behold oppression, for righteousness, but behold a cry." For judgment, that is the right exercise of government, restraining the evil, and maintaining the good: and what did he get? Tyrrany, the exaggeration of right judgment and the perversion of it into injustice. He looked for righteousness, right acting, conformity to the divine will, and what did he find? The commandments of men kept, and the commandments of God broken; the cry of the widow and the orphan, and the oppressed hireling reaching the ears of the Lord of Hosts, instead of that righteousness which he demanded from them. He looked for righteousness and what did he find? They were joining house to house, and field to field, that they might accumulate wealth, forgetful of that condemnation, "Woe unto you rich." He found others following strong drink, continuing until night, till wine inflamed them, and the harp and the viol, and tabret and pipe, and wine were in their feasts, but they regarded not the work of the Lord, neither considered the operation of his hands. He looked for righteous judgment respecting good and evil, and what did he find? "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness." He looked for a true estimate of human character, and of true humiliation before God our Maker, and he found that they were wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight; and therefore was the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, he stretched forth his hand against them, and smote them.

Here then was the voice of the Holy Prophet, one of those messengers of God, looking for the fru'

Spirit and calling for them in God's name, but he found oppression, unrighteousness, covetousness, drunkenness, pleasure-seeking, God-forgetting, evil placed for good, and good placed for evil; and yet boastful of themselves, wise in their own eyes, "And therefore hell hath enlarged herself and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth shall descend into it."

Now if we come to another prophet, another of these messengers that were sent to gather the fruits of the vineyard, we find the prophet Jeremiah warning them of the same danger. He was in another age a second messenger of God seeking the fruits of the vineyard, and he only received that ill-treatment of which our Lord speaks. In the 7th chap. of Jeremiah, and the 2nd verse, we read "stand in the gate of the Lord's house," and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other Gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for ever and ever. Behold ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other God's whom ye know

not; and come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name, and say, we are delivered to do all these abominations?" Here we have the same testimony, because it came from the same Spirit. They had the temple of the Lord, they boasted of that temple, and they trusted in it. They had the priesthood of the Lord, they had succession from Aaron: and they boasted of that priesthood and trusted in it, and yet while they were thus very zealous for the ordinances, the divinely appointed ordinances of God's house, and very trustful in the priesthood that was over them, the divinely appointed priesthood, their morals were bad and their end was destruction.

We have another voice to the same purpose in the prophet Ezekiel, where he says in the 33rd chap. and the 31st to the 33rd verse, "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words but they will not do them: For with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass, lo it will come, then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them." They could sit before the Lord's prophet and take pleasure in hearing the Lord's words, and yet their hearts went after their covetousness, they heard the words, but they mistook hearing for doing, and they did them not.

If we turn to the 6th chap. of the prophet Micah, we have a similar voice in this messenger of God, who came to call for the fruits of the vineyard

the name of God. It is said in the 6th to the 8th verse, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee O man what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee; but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly before thy God?" They did not yield these fruits of the vineyard. They did not do justice, or love mercy, or walk in humility, and therefore ten thousand rivers of oil could not heal the wound of the daughter of Judah's people.

The last of these prophets speaks with the same voice of solemn warning. Malachi says, "Behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea and all that do wickedly shall be stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." And in the 4th verse, "remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments, Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers' to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers' lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

Let us examine human history therefore as written not by the hand of erring man, but by the unerring hand of God's inspiration, and we shall find frailty, deficiency, and sin marking the whole course of the appointed church

of God. Both prophet and priest were profane, and their wickedness was found in God's holy house. The prophets were sent to warn them, and to demand from them the fruits of the vineyard, and behold the result, beating some, killing others, stoning some, and lastly crucifying his own Son. When the Son of God stood amongst them and demanded from them the same fruits; when he spoke to the covetous, they derided him, and to the self-righteous, they rejected him, and to the priesthood, they crucified him, they cast out his name as evil, therefore Christ said unto them in the 23rd chap. of Matthew, and the 23rd verse, "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith. These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Here then was what God demanded of them, and what men refused to give. And what did God do to them? "He hath broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her, so that the boar out of the wood doth waste her, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it." A desolate house, a scattered people, a ruined land, these were the terrible thunders of God's judgment telling us what he was to do to the rulers of his people, to the covenant breaking people of Israel.

II. Now brethren let us inquire how far those words are applicable to us. Our text says, "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." That is only partially applicable to the Gentile churches. It is, however, in part spoken to us; for we learn from the 11th chap. of the Epistle to the Romans that we now occupy the place and standing of the Jewish people. It is there said in the 17th

verse, "If some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree: boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." We are therefore grafted into the stock out of which they as a branch were broken off. We are put into their place, and we occupy their standing before God. This is the continual parallelism drawn in the New Testament between the Gentile church and Judaism of old. In the 10th chap. of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians and the 11th verse, the apostle says, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come." A very admonitory prophet among the christian prophets, the apostle Jude, reminds us of the same thing, that we occupy the same sort of privileges, and the same standing before God: he says in the 5th verse, "I will therefore put you in remembrance though ye once knew this, how that the Lord having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed them that believed not." We occupy then the same position before God which the Jew of old did, the same sort of Kingdom of God which in the days of our blessed Saviour the Scribes and the Pharisees, and the Jewish Priesthood had. If they had a Jewish Priesthood we have a Christian Priesthood. If they had a house in which the name of God was worshipped, we have the same. If the oracles of God were committed to them, the oracles of God are now committed to us. If they had circumcision, we have baptism. If they had the passover, we have the Lord's supper. If they had the outpouring of the Spirit, we have a larger measure of

the same. If they had a holy of holies on earth, we have a holy of holies in heaven. If to them the gospel was preached, the apostle says to us, let us therefore fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest any of you should seem to come short of it. We therefore brethren, occupy the standing which the Jew of old did before God. We have the same privileges and higher gifts. We have the same responsibility, and a more dangerous one in proportion to the greatness, the greater largeness of its blessings.

If there was one doctrine more than another, which one could have supposed would never have entered into the heart of any one with the bible in his hand, it is that fearful doctrine of the infallibility of the church. That men, that any body of men, could, with all the solemn warnings that are found in the New Testament, be found to dare to stand forward and talk of the infallibility of the church of Christ, is one of the most marvellous examples of the delusion of Satan which the church of Christ has exhibited: for if there be warnings in the Old Testament there are precisely the same warnings in the new; if there are predictions in the Old Testament of the ruin of the Jewish church, because she crucified the Lord of Glory, there are precisely the same predictions in the New Testament of the ruin of the Gentile church. If we turn again to the 11th chap. of Romans and the 20th to the 22nd verse, we find the apostle saying, "Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high minded but fear; for if God spare not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell severity, but toward thee goodness if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou

also shalt be cut off." How can men dare to speak of the infallibility of the Gentile church when we have such a warning as this? "If thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." But what is here given us as a warning is in the continuance of the chapter delivered as a prediction, "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all." "He hath concluded them all in unbelief." Every dispensation of God that has yet been in the world has ended in the unbelief of man. Adam stood in his original righteousness, and there he failed, and thence he fell. The world stood in its probationary state from Adam to Noah, and it became a Christ-rejecting and a destroyed world. The Gentile patriarchal church from Noah, through Melchisedec to Abraham's day were favoured by God with prophets, but that church universally corrupted itself into idolatry. Israel from Abraham to Moses were kept in the promised land as sojourners, or cradled in Egypt, and yet they fell into idolatry, and rejected God. In the wilderness they were, with Moses, a gainsaying people. From Joshua to the prophets, we find them continually corrupting the truth. They were disobedient to the word of their Lord until Nebuchadnezzar desolated their temple and scattered the people. A feeble remnant was restored, and what does it do? Forgetting all the glory that had been amongst them, and not knowing the voices of the prophets, nor the signs of the times. "Jesus came unto his own and his own received him not." "He hath concluded them all in unbelief."

And if we look at the history of the Christian Church, what do we find? For a short time, and but a short time they stood in somewhat of a feeble light, and yet,

even in the Apostle's days, we find all them that were in Asia turning away from the Apostle: we find St. John, speaking as the mouthpiece of the Saviour, warning the seven churches under his care there that Christ would remove the candlestick out of its place. We find corruption gradually spreading over the church until the desolation that came upon her through the fall of the Roman empire, and again the voice of God was heard. In christendom, what do we find? The glory of the true gospel of God made manifest at the Reformation, the eastern churches remaining in their superstition, the great western christendom having oppression instead of judgment, having a cry instead of righteousness; and even our own church, how is it defiled with worldliness, with covetousness, with Christlessness, with coldness, can we dare to say christendom as it now stands, if it were to come to judgment, and the Head of the church were to meet his baptized body on earth, that we have stood in God's goodness? Is it in Italy, that is only kept by foreign bayonets from a baptized brotherhood slaughtering each other? Is it on the continent of Europe, anywhere, that we can find a baptized body of christians bringing forth the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God? Is it in England, with the feebleness of divine love, compared with others indeed, (when we are foolish enough to do so) we may appear bright, but, is it in England with all her wealth, and the small amount of that wealth thrown into the Lord's treasury, with all her energy directed to the world more than to God? Would England dare to say that she has stood in the goodness of God? And therefore there is indeed an awful warning here, "behold therefore the goodness and severity of God; on them which

fell, severity, but, toward thee goodness, if thou continue in goodness, otherwise, thou also shall be cut off." And, Brethren, we have entered now upon that period of the Gentile church's history in which the warning voice of God has gone forth , and the judgment of God shall soon take place. We find in the 14th chap. of the Book of Revelations, that there is a series of events predicted, which are declared, prophetically declared, to end in ruin. There is first a new proclamation of the gospel to all nations, the universal gospel preached with this addition, "for the hour of his judgment is come." There is then the falling of Babylon from bad to worse, and becoming the habitation of devils, "another angel followed, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen. There is then the persecution terminating with that dreadful admonition, that if any man worship the beast and his image the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, Then the Son of man sends forth his ministers to gather his fruit. The true people of God are gathered, "thrust in thy sickle and reap; for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe, and he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped." Here is the gathering of the wheat into his garner, the taking up of the saints to meet the Lord in the air: and then what is the end of the Gentile church?" And another angel came out from the altar which had power over fire, and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, "thrust in thy sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe: and the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great wine-press of the wrath of God."

Is it not a marvelous mystery of satanic delusion that any one should dare to speak of the infallibility of the vineyard of the Lord, of a vine which thus has the judgment of God written upon it, that it is to become an earthly vine and to be cast into the great wine-press of the wrath of God ?

That voice speaks to us in a voice of solemn warning: if the whole church will not listen, at least let the believers in Christ solemnly, earnestly, faithfully, prayerfully, listen that we may have the grace of God to bring forth those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God.

It is my duty briefly to appeal to you in God's name this morning for one of those fruits of the vineyard.

Many and deep are the wrongs which England has inflicted upon Africa. The curse of the slave trade has been a blot and taint upon England's character, and for many years she has endeavoured to wipe out that blot from off her by her legislation and by her costly sacrifices, in endeavouring to remove that slave trade. The blessing of God has rested upon the missionary efforts which have been made in Africa, and now there is the voice of God in his providence crying to us from Sierra Leone, the centre of England's benificent influence that once had been the centre of England's cursed influence. There we have christian churches becoming so numerous, and christian communicants so many that they need that episcopal superintendence which Christ has appointed in his church, the ministry that is the head and source of all true ministry, so far as human ordinances are concerned, and around which Christ has clustered more of power than around any other ordinance of human ministration in his church.

An appeal is made to us to provide a bishop for Sierra Leone. The providence of God is giving an influence of good there,—grace and peace, prevail there, almost beyond any other spot of the church's operations on earth. Surely it is an appeal to us to bring forth the fruits of the vineyard, that we may thankfully contribute to such an object as this. There is found one minister of the church of England willing to go to that place, that has been so often called the grave of Europeans, and there to devote himself to his Saviour's service in that portion of his church. We may feel it to be indeed an opportunity for the thankful exercise of christian love, to contribute of our means to his establishment and his comfort there.

I feel, brethren, that every heart and every conscience this morning will consider that this is an appeal not from man but from Christ that every effort which is within our power may be made by which we may turn a well-earned curse into a very great blessing from him who has promised that if the wicked shall turn from the evil of his doings, his sin shall no more be remembered but his thank-offering of God shall be accepted with mercy through Christ.

III. In the last place we have to consider who are the nation of whom our Saviour says, "the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." They are not the Gentiles, for the Gentiles have not borne the fruit: but they are the restored converted Jews. They are the nation, the descendants of the very people to whom Christ then addressed himself. They shall bring forth the fruits: but when? When the spirit of burning and the spirit of judgment shall have taken away all the evil from the midst of them,

and all the sins that they committed shall have been punished by the sword; and they shall be a restored nation prepared to meet a returned Saviour, and the word of the Lord shall go forth from Jerusalem, and the law of God from Mount Zion. The 26th chap. of the prophet Isaiah gives this view to us of the nation that is to bring forth the fruits thereof. "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: we have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates that the righteous nation that keepeth the truth may enter in." Here is the righteous nation that keepeth the truth, or (as the margin reads it) the truth, that is, the faithfulness. They shall enter into a rebuilt Jerusalem, a returned nation, and that a righteous nation: they shall enter in, and they shall be indeed a nation bringing forth the fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God. Of that nation we read in the 31st chap. of the prophecies of Jeremiah, in the 33rd and 34th verse, "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them, unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Christ at the very moment that he was speaking words of judgment, was including in those words promises of mercy. While he was telling these Christ-rejecting Scribes and Pharisees that the Kingdom of God should be taken from them, he was

teaching those who were instructed in the divine word that there should be a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof, and that nation those very people whom he then addressed. They were to know the Lord from the least of them unto the greatest, and the very warning which he gives, taken out of the 118th Psalm includes the same thing: Did ye never read in the scriptures, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes." Now as this scripture includes the builders' rejection of Christ, it also includes the Saviour's acceptance of the people. We read there in the 19th verse, "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them and I will praise the Lord: this gate of the Lord into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord." The cry is written there already, recorded by inspiration, for that people. The words are put into their lips, and Christ reminds them of those words, "ye shall not see me till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." The children had heard these words, Save now I beseech thee for the word Hosanna is the Syriac form of these Hebrew words, "save now I beseech thee" *hosnia-na* hosannah, was merely, save now I beseech thee. The time had not come for Jerusalem to hear these child-

ren's words, but they will do so, and the nation will say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Of this people we find again in the 5th chap. of Micah, the blessed prediction, that they shall indeed bring forth the fruits of righteousness, "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men."

Such is the parable given to us by our blessed Saviour, telling us of future mercies, warning us of present responsibility, in which he says, "whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." So shall it be when the pleading Saviour shall become the awful judge, and those lips that now plead in mercy for us with the Father shall then say—Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

Oh brethren! let it be indeed our Prayer that we may hear the word of God's prophet, the voice of God's word, that we may search and examine our hearts, putting away from us all sin, all unholiness, and take to ourselves the Saviour and his grace, the Saviour who is pleading for the supply of our need, the Saviour who is offered for the sanctification of our souls, the Saviour and his present all-conquering grace to enable us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, and looking forward to that blessed day, the second appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XVII.

THE WEDDING GARMENT.

ST. MATTHEW, chap. xxii., 12th v.—"*How comest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?*"

Our title to Heaven should never be confounded with our fitness for Heaven; our title to Heaven is alone the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, faith in his cross, or rather, faith in him that died on the cross is that which gives us our only title to Heaven, an inalienable title to all its blessedness, while the qualifying power of his spirit, making us meet for Heaven, is that which gives us fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light These two things are too often confounded; they can never be really, finally, separated, but they should be most clearly distinguished. Every one that seeth the Son and believeth on him hath everlasting life; his title to Heaven is as secure as the cross of Christ was accept able to God the Father, and every one that seeth the Son and believeth on him, receives the qualifying power of that atoning spirit which makes him meet for all the blessedness that is treasured up for the redeemed in glory in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many passages of scripture are dealing exclusively

with the formal question—our title to Heaven, as the Apostle Paul, in an early chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, declares "we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Other passages of scripture are dealing exclusively with our fitness for Heaven, and one of these is the parable of the wedding garment, from which our text is taken.

The characters of men are constantly described in scripture by a garment, because we can judge of the qualities within by the dress without. No two people can really dress exactly alike; even if we put the same clothing upon them they will adjust it in some degree so as to evidence their character, their feelings of heart, and their capacities of mind by their clothing. We never could suppose that the meek, the humble, the self-denying would voluntarily clothe himself with the bedizenments of mere gaudy ornament; we feel there would not be a congruity between the clothing without and the clothing within. And so the scriptures teach us to speak of men's character under the figure of a garment, because, indeed, if there be no reason for hypocrisy,—if there be no obstruction,—that which is external is conformable to that which is internal. Now, in order to describe our christian character, we have our blessed Saviour set before us, as his people's clothing, that is, that as we judge of men's character by their clothing, so we are to judge of the character of the christian church by its conformity to the image of Christ.

In describing our title to Heaven, the sinner is represented as putting on Christ upon him, because that only clothing in which the guilty soul,—the sin-spotted soul can stand before God with acceptance, is Christ between the sinner and the Creator, so that when God looks upon

the sinner he is represented as looking at him through Christ, and so seeing Christ and not the sinner, as the apostle describes it in the 3rd chap. of Galatians, "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." These are the garments of justification in which the sinner in all his guiltiness without, in looking for change of mind, or heart, or any such thing, is just in the midst of his sins to look up to Heaven and to believe that he who is there now, at the right hand of God, is he who hung upon the cross for his sins; that he whom God has accepted in that blessed Son of God and son of man, who is pleading there, is accepted through the atoning blood of that cross. The guilty sin-defiled soul for whom he shed his blood, is he who is to trust in him as him that justifieth the ungodly; counting faith in that Son of God in the place of righteousness.

But there is another garment in which men, who have already been baptized, are said to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, as you will find in the closing verse of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, c. 13, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof." And here it is not Christ imputed but Christ imparted; that is not the glorious robe of Christ's merits counted as our merits, but the glorious robe of Christ's sanctifying grace imparted to Christ's people, so that they shine in the loveliness of his imparted beauty, and in the spotlessness of his imparted holiness, standing perfect and complete in the presence of the all-searching Creator, and seeing there in beauty their vile bodies made like unto the Saviour's glorious body; their vile souls made like unto the Saviour's glorious soul; body, soul, and spirit, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, before the brightness, presence, spotlessness, and faultless holiness of God.

Now it is to teach this latter truth that our Saviour gave this parable of the wedding garment. In examining the parable of the wedding of the king's son, we are to consider it as a prophecy, and as a moral teaching, in which two respects it has a very great diversity of aspect. As a prophecy it refers to times yet future; as a moral teaching it refers to all times. It speaks here of the Kingdom of Heaven being like unto a certain king who made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to invite guests to the wedding. Now, these guests were not the bride; they were guests who feasted with the bridegroom and the bride, but not the bride herself. The first time the message was sent forth they that were invited would not come: again he sent other servants to ask them a second time, but worldly things made them neglectful, some of the servants were shamefully treated and some were slain, but none of those who were invited attended. And then the king is represented as sending forth his armies to destroy those murderers, and to burn up their city. And then sending his servants into the highways and hedges to invite all, as many as they should find, into the marriage, and "so those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all as many as they found in them, both bad and good, and the wedding was furnished with guests."

As a prediction, this parable would set before us Jew and Gentile in the various invitations that were made, and it gives us the same view of the church of Christ, that we have already seen in the parable of the net, the indiscriminate gathering into the Gospel net of Christ. They gathered together as many as they could find both bad and good, so that the wedding was furnished with guests, teaching us that Christ's mercies were

thrown open to the whole world and that not merely was there an invitation made, but no scrutiny before admission into the feast; that they were admitted in without any scrutiny and brought into the privileges of God's house. They were not examined at the door whether they had the wedding garment, but they were allowed to sit down as guests. It was not the servants but the King who came to search into the character of those who were seated there as his guests; for ever rebuking the folly of those who regard the Christian church as if it were intended of God to be a collection of none but holy persons. It was intended of God to be a great school for the reception of the ignorant,—a great hospital for the reception of the diseased, that they might obtain instruction to remove their ignorance and to take away all the diseases. But, as a prediction of the latter times, if we come to consider this parable of the wedding feast, we have not only to consider these guests, but the bride and bridegroom.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain King which made a marriage for his son. Now that marriage for the King's son refers to the time of the coming marriage—the coming wedding of the Lord Jesus Christ. While in its moral and spiritual bearings this parable applies to all time, as a prediction it fixes upon one particular point of a time yet future, when a great voice shall be heard from heaven saying, "the marriage of the lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready." As a prediction, it sets before us the thought of a preparation to receive the Lord Jesus Christ in a very peculiar character,—the husband of his glorified church; and it sets before us the thought of those who have departed hence in the Lord, in a very peculiar manner, as the bride of that

blessed son of man returning with him in glory; so that as a prediction, there are three parties in this parable,—the bridegroom, the bride, and the guests collected together both bad and good. In the 19th chap. of Revelations we have the bridegroom and the bride very strikingly brought before us when it is said in the 7th verse, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him, for the marriage of the lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready, and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." We must parallelize this declaration with the 21st chap. and 2nd verse of this same book in order that we may arrive at its real meaning. "And I John saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Here then we have a very important and very deep truth brought before us. Where was the bride? With God *in* Heaven, otherwise she could not be said to come down from God *out of* Heaven. And how was she occupied there? His wife hath made herself ready. Heaven is no place of idleness; Heaven is no place of stagnation, Heaven is a place of active exercise, of holy preparation, of blessed discipline of soul, of glorious deepening in brightness even in the divine presence, of most fervent continual, kindling of divine love, in the reception of a deeper impress of the Saviour's image; for it is no small privilege to be in reality the bride of Christ; it is no small attainment to be made meet to be in that holy companionship, and most blessed intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ which is intended to be implied in this, She is the bride, the lamb's wife. In heaven nothing that defileth can enter, and yet there how many infant souls

enter, how many who have not had much discipline here. But let us compare the most disciplined, the most holy heart that can be found on earth, can that heart be said to be trained into all that is involved in the relationship of bride to bridegroom, of wife to husband, of companionship with such a being as the Lord Jesus Christ? Need we wonder, therefore, that in Heaven there is a state of preparation? The Romanist darkens, degrades, and renders impure this blessed truth by pointing, not up to Heaven, but to the pains of purgatory, for some purification in the intermediate state; but the bible glorifies, brightens, and makes clear to us that important truth, that he who is to be for ever with his church, and so have his church for ever with him, must even in Heaven prepare that church for the exercise of all the blessedness which she is to enjoy with him. And it is taken from the time when the first saint was taken up to Heaven down to the time when Christ shall come again to accomplish this great work, "I John saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down from God, out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Why should we think there was any strange marvel in this? How can we hope that we should know how to walk with Jesus if we were not trained for it? Capacities we receive here for spiritual enjoyment, capacities for spiritual employment also; but all that training of heart, all that exercise of mind, all that furniture of knowledge, all that discipline of skill that will enable us to be in reality and truth in all the complicated and most blessed intimacy that is implied in the bride and the bridegroom, require ages of heavenly experience, the brightness of heavenly glory and the wisdom of heavenly knowledge to produce in us the blessed state prefigured here, "She came down from

God out of Heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Here then this parable directs our thoughts to this, that the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain king, which had a son, and that son a bride, and that bride and bridegroom guests at the wedding feast. Now, if we turn to the 45th Psalm, we have these three things also in the 13th to 15th verses, "The king's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is of wrought gold, she shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework; the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee, with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought, they shall enter into the king's palace." Here again we have the bridegroom saying, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear, forget also thine own people, and thy father's house, so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." And we have the bride brought unto the king with raiment of needlework, when she shall be presented without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, and wholly without blemish; and we have the virgins her companions who follow her, brought also,—those of whom Christ speaks here, considering this parable as a prediction, who shall be admitted to the marriage supper of the Lamb. If we turn to the 19th chap. of Revelation, we have those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, in the 7th verse as I have already read, "Let us be glad and rejoice and give honor to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready." And then in the 9th verse he saith, "Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." These are therefore to be the called ones to that marriage supper at the point of time when our blessed Saviour shall be

come down from God out of Heaven with his bride; and this gives us some degree of light upon that very difficult statement, or rather, obscure statement of scripture about the work of Elias when he shall come again as our Saviour says in the 17th chap. of St. Matthew and the 11th verse, "Jesus answered and said unto them Elias truly shall first come and restore all things. But I say unto you that Elias is come already and they knew him not; and have done unto him whatsoever they listed," Elias had come in spirt in the person of John the Baptist. Elias shall come and restore all things, Elijah the prophet that is to come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

In this respect, the guests invited to the marriage supper are especially, as a matter of prediction, the Jews. They are to be the principal guests, as a matter of prophecy, to be admitted into the wedding feast with Christ. We, the Gentiles, now have a higher and holier calling for we hope to be, not the companions, or followers, but the bride, the blessed bride herself, made meet for her Saviour-husband; as the apostle says, "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." But there is a discipline, a preparation of the Jewish people to be made meet for the marriage supper of the Lamb. We find in the 20th chap. of the prophet Ezekiel, that there is a mysterious dispensation to go forward towards the restoration of all things, where the Lord says in the 34th and following verse, "I will bring you out from the people and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scatttered; with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out will I rule over you, and I will bring you out from

the people and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered; with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out: and I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you saith the Lord God. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you under the bond of the covenant, and I will purge out from among you, the rebels and them that transgress against me. I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel, and ye shall know that I am the Lord." Here is the work which probably is indicated by what Elijah the prophet was to do in restoring all things. Here we find the people, bad and good, gathered together, and the Lord will not allow to enter into the land any that are unholy, unrenewed. He will make them to pass under the bond of the covenant, and it is he that will do it. So again in the 9th chap. of Amos, and in the 9th and 10th verses, we have it declared, "Lo, I will command and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the last grain fall upon the earth. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, the evil shall not overtake nor prevent us." The Jewish people therefore, considered as a matter of prediction, and those amongst them who are without the wedding garment will then be purged out as rebels, and those who are prepared shall enter into the land, and they shall come to the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Gentile church shall experience that which we were reading this morning in the 14th chap. of Revelation, "the harvest of the wheat," and "the clusters

of the vine of the earth," as the apostle tells us in the 4th chap. of the 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians, that when the Lord shall descend from Heaven with a shout those amongst us who are prepared for his presence shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Such is then the view which scripture enables us to take of this parable, as a matter of prediction; now let us consider it as a matter of moral teaching. In this respect it teaches the same truth to all times, and that is, it teaches the need of fitness for the companionship of Christ, without which we could not sit at his future table: we must be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, or we cannot be found there. The qualification that fits one for true service on earth is the very same that fits us for true service in Heaven. They differ in degree but not in kind. He that believeth hath everlasting life; he that keeps the commandments of Jesus abides now in his love. Most beautifully was this taught by the manna that was gathered in the wilderness, and was laid up in the Holy of Holies. It was the same manna that was in the wilderness that was in the Holy of Holies, and Christ tells us that he will give to him that overcometh to eat of the hidden manna. That which we now receive as heavenly food at the Lord's table is that which we shall receive as heavenly food for ever—the hidden manna that is in the paradise of God, and therefore that nature which now enables us to feed upon that bread which cometh down from God, is the same nature that will enable us to feed upon that same bread in Heaven. And therefore the moral and spiritual teaching that belongs, as a matter of prediction, to the Jew, at the period of our Saviour's coming, is the same moral and

spiritual teaching that belongs to us now; and therefore we value the salvation of our souls, as we fear our soul's condemnation: as we hope for everlasting blessedness, does it become us deeply, diligently, earnestly to search into this question. Have I this wedding garment that will make me meet for the marriage supper of the Lamb—that will make me meet to be the bride, the Lamb's wife? Now in this respect the wedding garment is not the righteousness of Christ imputed to us; that would be no garment that would fit us to sit down there, and although, indeed, without that imputed righteousness we could not stand even in Heaven, for it is a truth, a deep truth, that the righteousness of the highest Archangel is but darkness compared with the brightness of divine glory; that the righteousness of any creature could not be essential righteousness, simply because it is creature-righteousness; so that if we were ever so holy and in ten thousand times ten thousand years were left for one moment to our own unrenewed strength and holiness, we should be just as sinful in one moment as Satan is now, and we should be as dark in one moment, if the divine lights were withdrawn from us, as the brightest morning the moment the sun's light were withdrawn. So that we must bear in mind that at all times, through eternity, we must have the imputed righteousness of Christ to cover the infirmity of creature-righteousness and creature-holiness, even in Heaven. How beautifully was this taught in the Holiest of all, when the cherubim standing there in the brightness of the firmament, only resplendent with the reflection of the divine glory that was shining upon them, they could not stand upon themselves, they must have their feet in the mercy seat, even they,—to teach us that it is in those mercies that rest upon the covenant of God

in Christ, that the glorified soul of the redeemed shall stand before it.

But still the wedding garment is not that righteousness imputed to us; it is Christ's righteousness imputed to us by which we are made like unto his glorious image in reality, and in truth to the very innermost of our nature. We have the wedding garment explained to us in the 61st chap. of the prophet Isaiah, where he thankfully exclaims, and with joy expresses not only the knowledge but the joyfulness of the soul that is clothed in this garment. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God for he hath clothed me with the garment of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels." You will find in the margin decketh himself "as a priest," as a bridegroom putting on his priestly garments for glory and for beauty, and as the bride adorns herself; it is the same; it is the glorious clothing that belongs here to the bridegroom and the bride. I will rejoice in the Lord for he hath covered me with a robe such as the bridegroom wears, a robe such as the bride hath for ornament, and these are the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness.

Now, what is salvation? It is not mere deliverance from hell; it is the perfection and the glory of our nature; it is the affection of our hearts, purified by grace and brightened into glory. What is righteousness? It is our whole nature being made right, every thing in its place, and every thing made glorious, beautiful, and holy; it is our whole nature made meet for the service of God,—meet for companionship with Christ. If we would know what all these are, let us look at them as

they are in our blessed Saviour. Let us look at them with eyes enlightened by the spirit of God, and with hearts renewed by the same blessed spirit. Let us look at him as he shows himself to us walking this earth—a dying life and a living death, walking this earth in meekness, lowliness of life, laying down his life for us, his hands full of bounty for all men, his heart full of love for the men for whom he died. His life is full of compassion for the unmerciful, the rebellious,—his nights of prayer,—his days of labour,—his earnestness of love,—his endurance of suffering,—his bearing the contradiction of sinners,—the fulness of grace and blessedness in all respects, as he says, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to declare liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Here is what he was, and here is what he is now—made glorious in heaven, and as he is, says the apostle, so are we in this world. If we be not made saints on earth, we never shall be saints in Heaven: if we be not made like Christ on earth, we never shall be like Christ in Heaven: if we have not learned to lay down our lives for the brethren on earth, we shall never live with him who has laid down his life for us: not upon the cross merely, but from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross we must be, like him, "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ that the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our body, for we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

O, brethren, it becomes us to search our own hearts, to examine our lives, to demand of our souls, of our

whole being;—are we making a living reality of that which was a formal ceremony, at our baptism—are we made like unto our saviour Christ; in all things walking in this world as He walked? It becomes us earnestly to ask ourselves: Are we really desirous of being like Jesus? are we earnestly desirous to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, in that Holy City, new Jesusalem, that shall come down from God out of Heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband?

If this be our hope then must we purify ourselves even as he is pure. If this be not our hope, and if this be not our aim, and if we are not able to say, "we do lay down our life for the brethren," then our only hope is condemnation; our only dwelling place is where our companionship can only be with the damned; we can have no choice but this: we must choose either Christ or Satan; we must choose the highest attainments in holiness, or sink down to the lowest depths of sin.

May the blessed spirit of God enable us to choose that good part which shall not be taken away from us, to remember the promise that is given to the meek, to the sinful, and to the erring, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out," remembering the offered strength and the offered grace that enables us to say "most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me because he hath said 'my grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness.'"

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XVIII.

THE FIG TREE.

ST. MATTHEW, xxiv., 32 to 34th v.—"*Now learn a parable of the fig tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.*

The analogy between nature and grace is constantly brought before our minds in the Holy Scriptures. That we may learn from things visible the invisible things of God is the great principle on which he has constructed the whole of creation. The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon, is a similar analogy to what our blessed Saviour gives us here, desiring us to look to the fig tree as a parable, mystical teaching of how we may discern the signs of the times respecting his own coming, and the end of the world.

Amongst the visible things thus setting forth the character of God's dealings the Fig tree occupies a very prominent place in Scripture. It had a peculiar con-

nection with the Jewish ceremonial: at the budding of the Fig the Passover took place, and at the ripening of the fruit was Pentecost. The one typifying the death of the Lamb, the beginning of the budding of life to a guilty world; the other, the out pouring of the Spirit, the perfecting of those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

The Fig tree has a remarkable peculiarity which distinguishes it from other trees, in that its fruit and its leaves grow together: and here again it is peculiarly qualified to instruct us in the character of the christian. We cannot see the budding forth of the leaf without a corresponding putting forth of the fruit. As the leaf grows the fruit grows. The leaf is the appointed emblem in scripture for doctrine, the fruit being the result of these doctrines: and we cannot with heaven-taught eyes look upon the Fig tree in this point of view without having indeed a deep lesson of heavenly instruction. From the first moment that a christian doctrine is put forth by any believer, at that same moment a corresponding fruit should be seen, and as the leaf does not put forth *its* perfection at once, and as the fruit does not put forth its perfection at once, but both grow together, so we have a right to expect from him who has the beginning of a christian doctrine, to have also the beginning of a christian fruit, and that both may grow together: so that in this also we may learn a parable of the Fig tree.

We find the Fig tree also occupying a prominent place in the last weeks of our blessed Saviour's life on earth. He was going into Jerusalem; he had spent his night at the Mount of Olives; there was a multitude of Fig-trees in the way, and he saw one tree that had

leaves; it was at a distance, and he could not therefore discern whether there was any fruit upon it or not, he saw the appearance of leaves upon the tree, and went to it, but found no fruit, and he cursed that Fig tree as a warning voice to the nation among whom he was. We could not understand that action of our blessed Saviour's, if we did not know that the leaf and the fruit should always grow together in the Fig tree. Christ did not wither the other trees, because we are told that the time of fruit was not yet. He did not expect it, but where he found the leaf there he expected the fruit. And was not this exactly the way in which the Lord dealt with the world. He came down from heaven to earth, and there was one appointed antitype, of the Jewish people, the Fig tree.

They had abundantly the leaf of profession of divine truth, but when Christ came to them he found no fruit, their grapes were grapes of Sodom, and their clusters were clusters of Gomorrah: and because they had the leaf of profession without the fruit of the spirit, He said, let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever. He did not do so to the Gentile nations, their time of fruit had not then come. That one nation only stood out amongst the rest of the nations of the world as that one tree stood out amongst the rest. In this then we have another occasion of learning a parable of the Fig tree.

If from these of our Lord we turn to the ancient prophets, we have in the 24th chap. of Jeremiah, the Fig-tree brought before us as God's appointed emblem of the Jewish people until their final restoration. We read there in the 1st and 2nd verses, "The Lord shewed me, and, behold, two baskets of Figs were set before the temple

of the Lord, after that Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, and the Princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon. One basket had very good Figs, even like the Figs that are first ripe; and the other basket had very naughty Figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad." We have the explanation of these two baskets of Figs, in the 5th verse, "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Like these good Figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down, and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart."

And as there was in our Saviour's days the blasted Fig tree to manifest the awful condition of the same nation, so is it here in the 8th to the 10th verses, "And as the evil figs which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the Lord, So will I give Zedekiah the King of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt; And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all the places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers." It was therefore no new figure when our

Lord addressed his disciples on the Mount of Olives, and said, "Now learn a parable of the Fig tree:" as if he had said, If you would know the impending judgment and the distant blessings that belong to your people, look to the Fig tree, and look to the prophets that speak of it, and you shall obtain heavenly instruction.

Perhaps the most beautiful example of the application of the visible things of nature to the prophetic unfolding of the working of divine grace to be found in the bible, is in the 2nd chap. of the Canticles, from the 8th to the 13th verses, where we have the signs of the times brought before us under these natural figures and emblems. "The voice of my beloved! behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart, behold he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows shewing himself through the lattice. My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The Fig tree putteth forth her green Figs, and the Vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Here we have the bride hearing her beloved's voice, and she knows that voice, and rejoices in it, and exclaims, It is the voice of my beloved, behold he cometh! It is not the first coming of Christ when he was to be as a lamb slain, crucified for our sakes: but it is his second coming when he was to be like the roe and the young hart, the Hebrew word tzebee, a roe is used for glory and beauty, for strength, and fertility, and blessings. It is in this point of view that the Bride is represented as saying,

Behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, and skipping upon the hills: see the king in his beauty, in that garment of glory and beauty, coming, not like a lamb for sacrifice, but like a young hart for strength: for he shall come in the glory of his Father: and of his own glory and shall bring his holy angels with him. And while he is seen thus in the beauty and glory of his coming, his voice is heard speaking unto the heart: hear my beloved as he saith, rise up and come away: and before he had thus spoken he shewed himself through the lattice, he exhibited himself through, as these Hebrew words signify, the air holes, the passages for the Spirit that sends down the Saviour's voice from heaven to us, and lets the brightness of the Saviour's image be seen from earth to heaven: he looked forth at the windows, flourishing or making himself visible through the lattice. Christ first shows himself to the believing soul in Heaven, at the right hand of God, and then makes himself heard from heaven calling upon those who hear him, and saying, Rise up and remain not in the degradation, the corruption of earth, for thou art beloved by me, thou art sanctified by me, rise up my love, my fair one, and come away for the time is come. The signs of the times are seen, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, that desolated state of the Fig tree is gone by, when the winter season was upon it, when all its leaves were off and all its fruit was gone: and that desolate flood spoken of by Daniel the prophet is gone by, which was determined to be poured out upon the dessolate: and now the flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing is come, these flowers of which we read in the 27th chap. of the Prophet Isaiah, where, speaking of the restoration of the Jews to their own land

again, we have in the 5th and 6th verses, "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me. He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." They must make peace with him who is at the right hand of God, then they shall blossom, they shall strike their roots downwards, and the budding forth of more fruits shall be seen until the world shall be filled with its glory. For the time of singing is come: the very words of the song we have in the same prophecy. In the 26th chap. it is said, "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; we have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." The Fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell, is a symbolic prediction of the revival of divine life in the long desolated Jewish nation, the time of which our Saviour said, "Now learn the parable of the Fig tree." When ye see these things come to pass, ye know that summer is nigh even at the doors.

The circumstances under which our Lord gave them these parables are also very peculiar and equally instructive. He had closed his public ministy: he had spoken to the people that awful warning, "Ye shall not see me hence forth until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." He had retired from Jerusalem and in company with the apostles had gone to the Mount of Olives. It was the close of a toilsome day, it was at the close of a day of no common instruction, and no common circumstances in the history of the people who then heard him probably for the last time. There he

was, probably about the time of sunset, seated on the Mount of Olives with Jerusalem's temple right in his view: he had said to his disciples that there should not be left one stone upon another that should not be thrown down, and the disciples came to him with a three-fold question, in which, in their ignorance of the divine purposes, they had disarranged divine events: "And they asked him, Master, when shall these things be? and what shall be thy sign of the coming and of the end of the world?"

In order to understand our Saviour's answer, we must see clearly what the question was.

They asked him when should the temple be thrown down? What should be the means of knowing when he should be coming? And what should be the signs of the end of the dispensation? A difficulty is created in our Saviour's answer by a misapprehension of what he declares in the last words of our text, "Verily, I say unto you this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." The fulfilment of anything in scripture does not mean the complete taking place of all that has been predicted; but the proof of the truth of the prediction, and so when it has begun to be accomplished it is declared in scripture to have been fulfiled. The Greek word here properly means come into existence, whenever therefore the other words that are used for this expression mean that it has proved true, as you will find by reference to Matthew 8th chap. and 16th and 17th verses, when our blessed Saviour stood among the Jewish people and performed miracles of goodness, that these miracles were to prove that he was that being who was to do these works, as had been foretold of him in the 53rd chap. of Isaiah, accordingly

he says "When the even was come they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils, and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet saying, himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses." Doubtless St. Matthew did not mean to say that the 53rd chap. of Isaiah, from which these words are quoted had not predicted in addition to what is given here, the crucifixion of our Lord who was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, but that amongst other things that were predicted which took place in this event in which our Lord performed these miracles of goodness, that was proved to be true that Jesus was the one to whom the prophet referred.

In the 6th chap. of the 1st book of Kings and the 1st verse, we have another example of a thing said to be done when it had began to be done. "And it came to pass in the 480th year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the 4th year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Tif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the Lord." The marginal reading is, that he built the house of the Lord which is the Hebrew expression there, but we paraphrase it by saying, he began to build. Just as in this case it is said Solomon built the house of the Lord in the 4th year of his reign, not indeed completed, but that he began it in that year, so Christ here says that this generation shall not pass till all these things come into existence; that is, begin to be accomplished, "That that generation should not pass until the truth of our blessed Lord's words should be seen." When we come to examine his own prophecy

we shall find that he did not intend to assert that every event that was there predicted was to come to pass during their lifetime. If you look at the 21st chap. of St. Luke, and the 24th verse, you will find that in this very prophecy he speaks of a long period much beyond the life of those who were then living. "They shall fall by the edge of the sword; and shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Here then our Lord himself predicts an interval between the ruin of Jerusalem and the restoration of the same in which the Gentiles are to have their time of probation when he was to be the light of the Gentiles, and to give to them that same probationary dispensation which had been given to the Jews of old. But now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.

If then we would learn the parable of the Fig tree as our Saviour gives it to us here, it arranges itself in the following order.

I. The preaching of the gospel with persecution.

II. The fall of Jerusalem.

III. The times of the Gentiles.

IV. The fall of the nation.

V. The budding towards summer.

VI. The coming of the Son of man.

These are subjects which we could not take up at the close of a sermon, I therefore propose to resume them again this evening.

But, brethren, let us not leave God's house without thinking of the solemn lesson which this parable of the Fig tree brings before us. It is predictive, setting briefly but clearly before us, the outline of the world's history; and it is also morally instructive, setting before us in the

standing and position of the Jews, the present responsibilities of the Gentiles. If the Lord made the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts, the house of Israel, and the men of Judah, his pleasant plant, and if the blasted, withered Fig tree was an awful warning to the Jews of God's impending judgments, assuredly we have no reason to expect that there shall be a less holy, a less righteous dealing with nations much more favored. We have not a yoke put upon us such as was put on them. We have a larger outpouring of the Spirit given to us than was given to them. We have means of grace more full and refreshing than theirs. We have opportunities of instruction, more teaching, more responsibilities than theirs. We have therefore on the one side a greater opportunity of blessing, and on the other side we have a greater condemnation of judgment. Let us remember the warning with which our Lord closes those very admonitions which he derives from the parable of the Fig tree. Let our loins be girt about, our lights burning, ourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord. "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing." "Take heed lest your hearts be at any time overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." The Jewish Fig tree has began to bud and the Gentile times are beginning to come to their close. The decay of the one, the revival of the other appears to be at our doors. It becomes us solemnly to learn of the parable of the Fig tree, and examine our hearts, and try our thoughts, and test our characters, to search and see whether we have not only the leaf of profession but the fruit of righteousness; whether God's holy Spirit has wrought in our hearts that faith in the cross of his Son, that Spirit

of the blessed Son of God which is producing in us those fruits which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. If we be found fruitless trees when Christ comes we shall be found also blasted trees. If we be found bearing fruit when Christ comes we shall hear those words "Come ye blessed children of my Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." "He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XIX.

THE FIG TREE.

ST. MATTHEW xxiv., 32 to 34 v.—"*Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.*"

These memorable words of Christ were, as we have seen this morning, spoken upon the Mount of Olives in a private discourse with the apostles, after our blessed Saviour had taken his leave of that ill-fated nation and resigned his public ministry amongst them. We have already seen how the Scriptures, as with one consent, bring the fig-tree before us as the appointed emblem of the Jewish nation, and our Saviour took it here in illustration of all the things which he was unfolding to them of the mind and counsels of God respecting the fate and fortunes of his Church from the time when he was then sitting with them on the Mount of Olives, down to that hour when he should come again in his glory and restore peace, and blessedness, and harmony to that world which had been ruined by Adam's sin. The prediction which he here delivered is recorded by three of the evangelists

—in the 24th chap. of St. Matthew, in the 13th chap. of St. Mark, and in the 21st chap. of St. Luke. They just possess such variations in the statements as mutually illustrate each other, and from a combined view of the whole we have a very clear view of the great outline of the intended dealings of God with his people and his Church.

I propose this evening to examine our Saviour's prophecy, as illustrated by the parable of the fig-tree, under the six great subjects which he himself brings before us:—

I. The preaching of the gospel accompanied by persecution.

II. The fall of Jerusalem with its accompanying signs and wonders.

III. The times of the Gentiles and their analogies and signs.

IV. The fall of the nations and its accompaniments.

V. The budding towards the summer: and

VI. and lastly, The coming of the Son of man in his glory.

It is to teach us all these that our blessed Saviour says, "Now learn a parable of the fig-tree." He had many fig-trees in sight at that moment; the disciples could have looked at them, for they were approaching the time of the passover, and could see the very thing taking place in nature—the branch yet tender and the leaf budding forth, and in this the indication that the summer was nigh.

I. We have first then our Saviour referring here to the preaching of the Gospel among all nations, accompanied by persecution, and his declaration that when that took place, then should the end come. There is a principle of two-fold fulfilment—indeed, perhaps we might

say a manifold fulfilment of our blessed Saviour's words: but, especially there is a remarkable two-fold fulfilment, one part being their application to the end of that dispensation in which we now are, the other to the end of the Jewish dispensation. Christ says, this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached among all nations, and then shall the end come. Now that did take place as a witness to all nations before the fall of Jerusalem came, for we have Scriptural indications and historic testimony that the apostles took the Gospel to every part of the known world, at least to what was then known as the world—that St. Paul especially preached the Gospel to the furthest west of Europe, and that others carried it to the furthest known parts of Asia before the fall of the holy city Jerusalem: so that it was before the close of that dispensation that the Gospel of the kingdom was preached among all nations. Not that all nations were evangelized in the sense that all nations had become nominally christians, but that it was offered to the whole world, and more especially was it offered to every synagogue of Judaism, for we find the apostles, as recorded in the book of Acts, going first to the synagogues, wherever they went, according to the Saviour's commission, beginning at Jerusalem.

Now that which took place before the fall of Jerusalem, —the offering of the kingdom—of Messiah's kingdom— to Judaism in order to its final rejection, is the very same thing that is represented in the 14th chap. of the Book of Revelations, as being the same thing which should take place before the end of our dispensation should come. Whatever might be done by the Christian Church in the long, and in many respects, dreary period of her history, with regard to the preaching of the Gospel among

all nations, however feeble might be the fulfilment of that commission given to the church by her risen Lord, yet towards the end, there should be an announcement of the Gospel as a witness to all nations. It is especially called by our Saviour the Gospel of the kingdom, not merely, therefore, the preaching of pardon, and the testimony of the work of the Holy Spirit, which is the eternal blessedness of Christ's gospel, but the expectation of Messiah's reign, which he peculiarly calls the Gospel of the kingdom. If you refer to the 14th chap. of the Book of Revelation, you find there the renewed publication of the Gospel of Christ: it is said in the 6th and 7th verses, "and I saw another angel fly in the midst of Heaven having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made Heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.'"

There is a manifold fulfilment of the words of Christ, for he who is unchangeable in his nature is also analagous in his dealings, and we find that before any considerable catastrophe takes place in any nation, there is a dealing correspondent with what has been done in former times. Before the fall of the Roman empire there was a preaching of the Gospel very similar to what took place before the fall of Judaism, and Augustine and others were raised up as great lights to bear testimony to the Gospel of the grace of God, and then, in a subordinate sense, the end came. Luther and our own reformers were raised up also of God, and from that hour to the present, there has been a testimony within the bounds of

Christendom; and now comes that larger testimony which is to go through the whole world—the everlasting Gospel to preach unto every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people—the sign—the great sign, which marks our own times when our missionary zeal is sending the gospel of the kingdom through the whole world; and, in that very fruit of the divine life, renovated within the Church, we have the admonition of the end, and we have the promise of the beginning of that brighter and more glorious period when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Now our blessed Saviour warns us that faithful ministers should have, in preaching this Gospel of the kingdom, much persecution, and so they had. What is the record that is left in the Acts of the Apostles, but the records of Christian sufferings and Christian triumphs? What is the record of the faithful ministers of Christ? From that hour to this their path is tracked in blood, while, indeed, it is illumined with heavenly glory; and that which especially took place in the first publication of the Gospel is again to take place, in some measure at least, in its second publication. We are now in our days of quiet, but how long this will continue we know not, for there is a time when that fearful question shall be answered, who is able to make war with the beast, for it is given to him to wear out the saints of the Most High, and he shall think to change times and laws. It was to be accompanied with signs and wonders, which come under our consideration more especially under the second subject, which our Lord's prediction on that Mount of Olives brings before our thoughts.

II. The fall of Jerusalem and its signs and its

wonders. He tells us that Jerusalem should be encompassed about with armies, and that when we should see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place then know that Jerusalem's desolation is nigh. Now that is to take place, or that was to have taken place twice. Jerusalem has been compassed with armies, and the desolating standard of the Roman idolatrous eagle was planted in the temple of God, and all Christian people at that time in Jerusalem took our Lord's warning, that they should flee to the mountains when that was seen, and the believing Christians escaped the judgment that then was foretold of Jerusalem by our Saviour. The fall of Jerusalem was accompanied by the signs which were given there. The record of that fall, as given to us by Josephus the Jewish historian, testifies to the truth of our blessed Saviour's words, that there should indeed be great signs in heaven and fearful sights; that there should be famines and pestilences in divers places.

These things were fulfilled to the very letter in the first fall of Jerusalem; but there is to be a second fall of Jerusalem, for our Lord's words have not yet been completely fulfilled. Jerusalem is to be again encompassed with armies, and another enemy of God's people is to come down upon the glorious land. There is a time when Jerusalem shall again be temporarily taken captive; her partially restored people carried away captive out of the city, and the end then coming will be very different from before. In the former fall and siege of Jerusalem she tottered to her fall and she fell to her ruin. In the second siege of Jerusalem she is indeed for a short season to be delivered into her enemies' hands, and then it is they which shall totter and

fall; it is they which will be broken to pieces, for we read in the 12th chap. of the prophet Zechariah. "The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, saith the Lord, which stretcheth forth the heavens and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him. Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it." This is the siege of Jerusalem which has not yet taken place. In the former siege *Jerusalem* was ruined, but in this the *besiegers* are to be ruined. We find it again referred to in the 14th chap., "Behold the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished, and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives."

Now here we have another sign of the times upon which we should especially fix our attention at this present moment. The Jews cannot be besieged in Jerusalem except they be in Jerusalem, and we are therefore to expect a partial restoration to Jerusalem when it shall again become a Jewish city. When we see that take place, we may indeed take notice that the end is coming. It says in the 102nd Psalm, "Thy servants take pleasure

in her stones, and favour the dust thereof," "The time to favour her, yea, the set time is come." And what our Lord speaks of the abomination of desolation is, I believe, more especially contained in the 11th chap. of Daniel the prophet, where we are told in the 45th ver., that that king of the north, that tremendous power which should come down against Jerusalem "shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain, yet he shall come to his end and none shall help him." And he who is to be the wilful king, accompanied by antichrist and all his power, shall come into the glorious holy land, shall come unto the glorious holy mountain, shall plant the abomination of desolation there, yet he shall not prosper, he shall come to his end, and none shall help him. This time is to be accompanied by fearful sights and great wonders, and miracles, and even fire shall come down from heaven to deceive them that dwell upon the earth.

III. This brings us to the third subject which our blessed Saviour brings before us in that instructive prediction, which is, the times of the Gentiles and their analogies and signs. He does not say the *time* of the Gentiles, but the *times* of the Gentiles, the seasons of the Gentiles; each portion of the Gentile dispensation in which some fruit was expected from the Gentiles. Now here we have our Lord speaking of that which was very obscurely delivered in the Hebrew prophets; a Gentile dispensation. There is a great deal of mistake made on this subject by those who study the prophetic Scriptures. The Gentiles are constantly spoken of in the Old Testament as being joined with the Jews, "The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." God's name is to be known

upon earth, and his saving health among all nations. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. These are truths that are so plain in the Old Testament that no one could possibly even superficially read its predictions and not see that it was foretold that Gentiles should be brought to the true faith of Christ, to the saving knowledge of God. But that is not what is peculiarly meant by the times of the Gentiles. The ancient Jews believed that the Gentiles should be joined with themselves in the worship of God; but that of which they were ignorant was this, that the Jews were to be cast out and the Gentiles brought in; that there is to be a Gentile dispensation distinct from, and in place of, the Jewish dispensation. This is that mystery of which the Apostle speaks, that it was unknown in former ages; that the Jew did not know that he was to be cast out and the Gentile brought in, in his place. It was taught in the Old Testament Scriptures, but it was taught so as to have been then obscure, and even to be still but little attended to by those who have studied the prophetic word. It is referred to in that remarkable first council at Jerusalem where the question of the salvation of the Gentiles was debated—whether Gentiles could be saved without being circumcised and submitting to the law of Moses. Here was the first time that the question was really debated, and St. James alleges the prophets as having declared that they could: he says in the 13th and following verses, "After they had held their peace, James answered saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me; Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name: and to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is

written, after this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up, that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things." Here St. James quotes the prophet Amos, in proof that there was to be a Gentile dispensation instead of a Jewish one, but the passage which he quotes appears to teach rather the opposite, for it predicts the re-building of Jerusalem, the setting up again of David's tabernacle, the restoration of David's throne, the making Jerusalem the centre of the world's blessing. Now this does not at first sight seem to imply the casting out of the Jews and the bringing in of the Gentiles, but if we look at it more carefully it will appear that at the time of the restoration of David's tabernacle there should be found two classes of Gentiles; there were to be the residue of men, and there were also to be those Gentiles that were called by the Lord's name. Therefore at whatever time the tabernacle of David was to be set up, according to the prophet Amos, there were to be found in the world two classes of Gentiles, the residue of men and those upon whom the Lord's name is called. Now the residue of men are plainly the unconverted, idolatrous nations; and who are those Gentiles upon whom the Lord's name is called but the Christian Gentiles? If the Lord's name be Christ, those who are called by his name are Christians: therefore the prophet Amos teaches that there were to be found, at this time of the restoration of David's tabernacle, Christian Gentiles. In order to that there must have been a Gentile Christian religion, and if there were a Gentile Christian religion, Jerusalem was to be a desolated city, and

David's tabernacle in ruins, and David's throne not standing. There were to be Christianized Gentiles while the Jews were yet in captivity, and cast off from the favour of God. Here then we have in this inspired comment upon the prophet Amos, that very period alluded to by our blessed Saviour, the times of the Gentiles: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

If we take again our Lord's words, the times or seasons, it would imply various harvests in the Gentile dispensation, while if we are to look at the history of the Christian Church we are to expect various seasons of God's dealings with the Christian Church: and indeed we cannot look at the page of ecclesiastical history without feeling that there were awful seasons,—that spring time, summer time, harvest time, were portions of the Gentile dispensation. Let us look at the Roman empire as it stood at its then time, and then look at that Roman empire as it stood in its Christianized state, and see how did God deal with it in its seasons. Why was it that when Constantine made the Roman world nominally Christian, that so soon after did the desolating hand of God's judgments come down upon the Roman empire? Why did not the adoption of the Christian religion save the empire from this ruin? We have the mystery explained to us in the 6th chap. of Revelation: there was a cry came up from that empire, as John declares in the 9th verse, "And when he had opened the fifth seal I saw under the altar the souls of those that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held, and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on those that dwell

on the earth?" What is this altar? No altar in heaven, for there is but one altar there, and there is but one blood there, the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an altar on earth; it is the martyrs' stake, and the souls that are there are the life blood of the martyrs; as the apostle says, I am ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand; and the cry of the martyrs' blood was that which brought down the judgments of God upon the nominally Christian but really unconverted Roman empire, for we read here that when he had opened the sixth seal "There was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sack-cloth of hair, and the moon became as blood, and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth." There we have the same symbol as you will find explained in the 34th chap. of Isaiah, where he describes the symbols of the fall of an empire. Is the prediction of the fall of the Roman empire, unrepentant for the blood of Christ's witnesses that were slain within her. Another time of the Gentiles was very remarkable,—the rise of Mahomet in the eastern church. There we have again, the scorpion power that is spoken of in this same book as we have it described in the 9th chap. and 18th verse, as killing the third part of men by the fire and by the smoke and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouths and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads and with them they do hurt. The prophet that teacheth lies, says Isaiah, he is the tail, the men that belonged to the false prophet, the Mahometan power which arose to slay the third part of men when the Roman empire in its eastern and western and southern divisions was divided into three parts, Europe in

one part, Asia in the second, and Africa in the other. The Asiatic power is here described,—the Mahometan power triumphing over the nominally christian, but really degraded churches of the east, they who were false prophets triumphing over those who were but false Christians; the crescent triumphing over the crucifix. And then he says the rest of the men which were not killed of these plagues, but yet repented not of the works of their hands, "that they should not worship devils and idols of gold and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood, which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk, and neither repented them of their murders, their sorceries, nor of their fornications, nor of their thefts." There we have the third part of men, and the rest of the men,—the other christian churches, remaining still in their idolatrous corruptions, worshipping demons instead of Christ, worshipping idols instead of the God that made heaven and earth;—they repented not. Did the western church cast off its superstitions when the eastern church was tyrranized over by the Mahometan power? Here then is another remarkable time of the Gentiles,—a season when God was dealing with them in great mercy, in great long-suffering, but finally in judgment, while another portion of his church, the African, has long ago perished from off the face of the earth.

There is one part here—the rest of the men, which refers especially to the western churches, those Romanist churches which are awaiting the fearful judgment of God. We have that third part in the 12th chap. of Revelations, where we have the vision given to us of a woman clothed with the sun; a great wonder in heaven, the church of Christ clothed with her Saviour, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars, the apostles those ministers of Christ who

were indeed a glorious crown to her, and yet of them we find in the 4th verse the tail of the dragon—the same thing as in the former case—the false prophets, "the tail of the dragon drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth." The fall from heaven to earth of the ministers of Christ is a symbolical fall—losing heavenly principles and becoming earthly minded, poisoned by Satan's power. And then the dragon takes that third part and makes them persecutors. There was war in heaven, there is Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels, and that lasts until the coming of the power of the Kingdom of Christ. And we have in the 10th verse, "I heard a loud voice saying in heaven now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ, for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night, and they overcame him by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death." Here we have that other third part then which are the Latin churches, as we have them here described, for indeed the Romish priesthood is poisoned by the venom of Satan, declaring a false gospel and a false Christ, instead of the true gospel and the true Christ who is alone worthy of faith and worship. Unless we are to believe a consecrated host to be the Saviour of the world the church of Rome has given a false Christ. Unless we are to believe the traditions of erring sinful men to be a true gospel, the church of Rome has given a false gospel instead of the true gospel of the grace of God. No other church that ever existed, from the foundation of the christian church to the present hour, has dared to put forth so blasphemous an article of faith as has the church

of Rome, for she declares in her own language in the Council of Trent, that if any one shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than a confidence in the divine mercy, pardoning sins for Christ's sake, let him be accursed. There is the creed of the church of Rome at this moment, and has been for three hundred years; and it is this which brands her as coming under the stigma here given, as being poisoned by the tail of Satan's malignity. Now it said that those who are to overcome that power are those who contend with the blood of the Lamb, while Rome comes with her awful curse and says that man is to be damned who will believe alone in the blood of Christ, the witnesses for Jesus come with that blessed declaration, "they are to overcome with the blood of the Lamb." The Romanist will come and strike the bible out of the hands of men, but the witnesses of Christ overcome by the word of their testimony, and they love not their lives unto the death.

These times of the Gentiles are now hastening on; they are indeed solemn times, for we have in the papal aggression that is at present attempted in this kingdom, and in the more successful aggressions in other kingdoms, the darkening of that cloud which is hastening on the final contest of which our blessed Saviour speaks in this very prediction.

IV. Succeeding to his declaration of the times of the Gentiles, the fourth subject brought before us by our Lord is, the fall of the nations and the accompaniments of that fall. The very word times or seasons infers the ripening of the harvest. Then if we have christianized nations dealt with in grace and in mercy, a true church, a ministry, the sacraments and revelation of God committed to the nations, they are standing upon their

probation. "Behold therefore," says St. Paul, "the goodness and severity of God, on them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shall be cut off" But we have not continued in Christ's goodness, the platform of Christendom has not continued in the goodness of the grace of God, as revealed in the gospel of his dear Son. And therefore Christ speaks here of the awful fall of nations which is to take place, "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the earth distress of nations with perplexity: the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." In the 12th chap. of Hebrews the apostle reminds us that this is an unfulfilled prophecy, where in speaking of an earthquake he says in the 26th and 27th verses, "Whose voice then shook the earth, but now he hath promised saying, yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven; and this word, once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." Here we have then a shaking of things in heaven and things on earth: in the symbolic language of scripture, the casting down of national thrones and national constitutions of the people of the world. That passage is quoted from the 2nd chap. of Haggai, where he declares of the then existing powers that they were not to last long; that the time was coming when the Lord of hosts would once more shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land, and all nations. Now if we turn again to the book of Revelation, we have that shak-

ing of the nations brought before us in very solemn and awful language. We find there in the 16th chap. and the 12th verse, the great river, the Euphrates, dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And here is the prediction of the withering away of the Mahometan power, that power which was to be marked out by the river Euphrates. And where is the Mahometan power that has not been withered up? Indeed, at this very moment the great capital, the centre of Mahometanism in India is about being made the centre of our Indian possessions. There is just that much said about it here, and the subject is then left in comparative darkness; but immediately follows three unclean spirits like frogs, coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet; for they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, and gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Now here is a pretence to superhuman power from three sources,—the beast, that is the secular power,—the dragon, satanic power,—the false prophet, pretended religious power. And do we find no indications of attempts at supernatural power at this moment? Have we no claims to false miracles by the false prophet? or why is it that an apostate minister of our own church, now unhappily seceded to the church of Rome, could stand forward and defend all its absurdities that are called miracles in the church of Rome as if they were truths? And why is it that we have so many men of science, yet but sciolists in science, infidel men, pretending to be able by the perfection of science to do miracles, as much as our blessed Saviour did of old; pretending, by the discoveries of

human science, to be able to equal the things that the blessed Jesus did. And the bible warns us here that these are not mere pretences, but though now indeed but pretences, they are like the full ripening of the harvest of wickedness. They will not be always so, for that which appears in man's sight to be of men is in heaven's sight demoniacal. They are the spirits of devils, they are unclean creatures like frogs, coming out of the shrine of this world instead of coming with the purity of heavenly power, and yet they are coming with real supernatural power, as we find it said in the 13th chap of the same book of Revelation, in the 13th verse, of the image of the beast, "And he doeth great wonders so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he has power to do in the sight of the beast, saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast which had the wound by the sword and did live."

Now what were these demoniacal miracles to denote? They were to make great conversions to those that were to gather men together, by the battle of that great day of God Almighty. It is an awful sign of the times to see, on the continent of Europe, so great a religious power of Popery, so great a democratic power as is now spread over the surface of the European continent. But, perhaps a more dangerous sign, is the great attempt by foreign sovereigns who will not stand fast in the liberty of Christ, and hope for peace by other means than by the diffusion of the principles and the laws of peace, to screw down by tyrannical laws that spirit that has risen up against them. Here is the prediction that we have respecting the foolishness of such attempts

in the 18th verse, "And there were voices, and thunders, and lightenings, and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath." Here we have then the fall of the nations predicted, and this a fall after a great gathering together of the nations. And we have much reason to hope, brethren, that our beloved kingdom and empire will be saved from that very judgment that is here spoken of. It depends upon our Protestantism whether we shall escape or whether we shall not: it depends upon our own maintenance of bible truth, upon our testimony to the blood of the Lamb, and our testimony against the abominable idolatries and gross superstitions of the corrupted church of Rome. From that very indication of the kings of the east, in connection with the declaration made in the 38th chap. of Ezekiel, the merchants of Tarshish joined with Sheba and Dedan in opposing the antichristian confederation, we have scriptural grounds to hope that we ourselves are raised up of God to be the witnesses of his truth, to be the maintainers of his gospel, and to support the testimony of his Son while all the world around remains in darkness.

V. But Christ speaks not only of the fall of the nations but of the budding towards the summer, when the fig-tree has yet her branches tender, and but beginning to put forth her spiritual life, "then know that summer is near, even at the doors." And although the Jew be not yet brought back to Jerusalem, yet the Jewish people are now more than ever attending to the truth of Christ. There

never was until latter days a Christian Jewish Missionary Society, but there is now. There never were so many sincerely converted Jews as we have now. Christ does not speak of the fruit, but of the bud, not of the full formed branch, but of the tender branch; "then we know that summer is nigh." And as the passover was not the perfection of the fig tree, and as the putting forth of its leaf was before the Saviour's coming, there will not be the conversion of the Jewish nation, but the reception of a certain amount of divine life, putting forth its buds and sending out its green leaves. Indeed every effort we make to bring the Jew to the knowledge of Christ is an effort towards hastening the bringing back of Christ to this world, for it is only a converted Jewish remnant that shall say, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down," that Christ shall come back again, and he shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives.

VI. And this brings me, in the last place, to what he here promises, "then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven," the Lord Jesus Christ coming in his glory. He shall come and bring all his saints with him; he who is now at the right hand of God shall have accomplished his mediatorial work; that he shall come to that only part of his creation which is his birth-place; he shall come to this world which we can rejoice in looking upon as the native place of Christ's manhood, to that rational creation of his who are bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and he shall bring down with him the spirits of just men made perfect, and bring their bodies out of the graves, and renew that body, soul, and spirit, that same perfected, glorified resurrection body which shall be indeed the light of the world and the glory of the nations of the

earth. That time is described in the 21st chap. of Revelation, where the Apostle John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, for he declares of that city in the 23rd verse, "And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day, for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Brethren, let us pray that we may learn the parable of the fig-tree; and, in looking for the signs of the times, may we be instructed by the blessed Spirit in the holy truths of scripture; that we may escape the pollutions of the world; that we may attain to the holiness of the Spirit, and be enabled with our loins girt about, and our lamps burning, to be like men that wait for the Lord and be found watching. May we become a blessed people in that day when he shall come to be glorified in his saints: and be admired in all them that believe.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XX.

THE TEN VIRGINS.

St. Matthew xxv., 1 & 2 v.—"*Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise and five were foolish.*"

How very different is the wisdom of this world from the wisdom of God. If we were to ask a thousand indifferent persons, who do you think is a wise man? the great majority of answers would be—the man who is prudent and skilful; who managed his worldly business well; who brought up his family respectably; who honourably advanced himself in life and left his family well off at his death. That would, in the great majority of instances, be the answer which we should get to that question, who is a wise man? If we were to ask our blessed Saviour who is a wise man, we have his answer here,—the man that is ready to meet the Saviour at his coming, not with the eye of a worldly mind fixed wholly upon the well paved roads of this world, that he might have a good earthly prospect, but the man whose eyes look before him and upward to that day which is to be the entrance to the eternal day. We have here brethren, our Lord's description of the wise and the foolish, not of the world,

but of the virgins; the wise among those whom he had made virgins, and the foolish among those whom he had made virgins. It therefore is a lesson not speaking so much to the world as to the church. It was given under peculiar circumstances: the Jews were not the men who were about him, not the Scribes and the Pharisees, nor the Herodians; the apostles alone were with him. It was not in public in the temple, but in private on the Mount of Olives that he delivered this most instructive parable, which is the only one that has a note of time appended to it, "*then* shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins." Prophetically it speaks of a very peculiar time of the Kingdom of Heaven, of the time when the Lord shall have come or shall be immediately about to come, for it is part of the discourse which we had in the preceding chapter where He speaks of the events which should take place when the Son of man should come,—that at that time—at midnight there should be a cry heard, "behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." As a prediction we have to consider this parable with reference to that peculiar note of time; as a moral instruction, solemn in its admonitions, holy in its teaching, and bright and heart-cheering in its encouragements, it belongs to no time because it belongs to all time.

The two parables which are in this chapter, in connection with the close of the chapter as representing the Son of man coming, combine together to give us a most complete view of our duty, our position, our responsibilities, as men who hope for eternal happiness, and who would dread the thought of everlasting woe.

Brethren, let us pray that the blessed Spirit of God may be amongst us this morning, that we may receive

the words of Christ to our soul's profit, and none of us be found amongst the foolish ones unto whom it shall be said in that day, "I know you not." It is the admonition of Christ our Saviour, "watch therefore for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

This parable speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven in its need of oil; the next parable speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven in its responsibilities, in the use of talents,—the one the need that the believer has of the unction of the holy Spirit of God to make him meet for the Son of man when he comes,—the other the need that the believer has to consider what are the trusts committed to him now, that he may be able to give an account of his stewardship when the great Lord of the steward comes, and the closing chapter gives us the holy judgment of the Son of man when all nations shall be gathered before him, and he shall separate the one from the other as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. The first parable speaks of the inward state of our souls, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his; the second, of the responsibility of our duties, that he who is the truth cannot say to those who have not done well, "well done good and faithful servants enter into the joy of your Lord," while the description of the judgment at the coming of the Son of man presents to us that important truth which we should ever keep before our minds, that religion, spiritual mindedness, does not make us the less men, and that the duties of religion and the holiness of religion do not prevent us being men in the ordinary duties of our common humanity. The rule given us there is—have we fed the hungry?—have we clothed the naked?—have we visited the sick?—have we gone to the prison

to comfort those who were bound in prison?—and in doing so have we shown the nature and the character of him who was the Son of man, the brother of the whole human race, who is the Lord of his church, the bridegroom of his believing people?

But now in this parable we have that most important question,—have we the unction of the Spirit of God?—and is it a bright light in us that may cast the beams of its brightness around even in the midnight darkness? "Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil for our lamps are gone out: but the wise answered saying not so lest there be not be enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, verily I say unto you I know you not. Watch therefore for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

I. I shall first consider the civil circumstances to which our Lord refers.

II. Its prophetic application.

III. Its moral and spiritual teaching.

I. The civil circumstances to which our Lord refers are the accompaniments of a wedding, that when any one was going to be married, while he and his bride were engaged in the marriage ceremony, those who were honoured with being the attendant virgins upon that bride on her return to her house with her newly married husband, waited at the night time until the bride and the bridegroom were ready to come back and return to their house; and they were expected to be ready with their lamps, and those lamps lighted to accompany that bridal procession home to the house of the bride; that those who were ready with their lamps would not only accompany them upon that return of the bridal procession but be admitted into the wedding feast; and that those who were not ready would be disgraced by not being permitted to accompany them, nor to enter into the wedding feast. This was an image familiar to every one who heard Christ at that time. The apostles could make no mistake about these circumstances for they were well acquainted with them.

We have here ten women waiting for the return of the bride and the bridegroom, and they had every means of being properly ready for that procession. They were virgins, they had lamps, they had vessels with the lamps, they had the opportunity of getting oil, and they were all waiting there; the one set neglected their oil, the other brought oil in their vessels with their lamps. This is the only point of difference remarked by our blessed Saviour: they agreed in every particular but the oil. They had no doubt that they were appointed there to wait upon the bride and the bridegroom; they had no reason to doubt of their acceptance when he should come; they knew their position and they knew their

duty; but the one part forgot their responsibilities and the means of being ready. Here, therefore, we have the natural circumstances which our Lord brings before our thoughts, as illustrations of the relation in which we stand to himself.

II. Now let us consider what he intended these things to illustrate, that we may be able to understand the prophetic character, that is, the predictory character of this parable. We can make no mistake of who is the bridegroom, we know that it is the Lord Jesus Christ; we need make no mistake about the bride, for we know that it is the spirits of just men made perfect, who are now being gathered together in heaven. The bride, the Lamb's wife, is declared by St. John in the book of Revelation, to come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. The bride and the bridegroom are not the point of this parable, but the attendant virgins; that when the Lord Jesus Christ is to come back from heaven, and when the Lord Jesus Christ is to bring back his redeemed and glorified spirits with him from heaven, they shall be his bride in that day, and then there will be on earth expectant attendant virgins, ready to meet him, and that the kingdom of heaven in that day will be compared to ten virgins: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins." That is, that at whatever hour our blessed Saviour is to return from heaven to this world, that the then state of the Church of Christ on earth shall be like to ten virgins expecting their Lord.

Now, through the whole Church of Christ from one end to the other, every Sabbath day comes forth the declaration of faith, he is coming again in glory to judge both the quick and the dead, and that

whatever mistake there may be in the Church of Christ, there has been but one voice from the time of our Saviour's resurrection down to the present hour—the whole church believes that he will come again to judge both the quick and the dead. On this there never has been a mistake; there never has been a dubious cry in the Church respecting that point. And here our Saviour represents no unbelief on this point, the virgins are all represented as actually expecting his coming, only there are some who are so far forgetful of the need of preparedness for his coming that they are not ready. It is not unbelief, but unpreparedness, that is the great point of this parable. They agreed in being virgins: the scriptural application of a virgin is not an individual, but a community. It is a symbolic parable that is given to us here, and therefore we must treat the images symbolically. We have no where in scripture an individual christian represented as a virgin; it is a community or church that is compared to a virgin. We read of the virgin daughter of Israel, and we read of the virgin daughter of Babylon, and St. Paul, in the 11th chap. of the 2nd Corinthians, speaks of the Corinthian community or Church, when he says "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." How much does one word of our blessed Saviour suffice to settle many painful disputes that prevail in the Christian Church. We have men disputing whether the Church of Rome be a church, or whether the Eastern churches be churches, or whether so fallen, so foul communities, as many of them are, can be churches. Does not our blessed Saviour teach us here, that there may be a virgin, that there may be a church

without the light of God's Spirit, and yet a virgin still. They therefore agree in this, that they are Churches, and they agree in this, that they all have lamps, that is, they have the vessels provided for them, that they were made fit to receive the oil. It was therefore no want of means to receive the oil that constituted the deficiency of these virgins, and here again we find the whole kingdom of heaven represented as being furnished with the appointed means of receiving and containing the unction of God's holy Spirit. Again we read that there were vessels to receive the oil and to pour it into the lamps, and here also in the furnishing of these virgins we do not read of any difference, except that they wanted oil on the one side and they had oil on the other.

Further we are told that while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept; and this represents the whole kingdom of heaven as being in a slumbering, sleepy state. How truly has this been fulfilled with respect to the Christian Church, for although there are here and there individuals who are waiting for their Lord's coming, and making it a practical reality that they do not know the day when he shall come, yet where is the voice of the whole Church of Christ indicating that there is any community on earth that as a community are practically expecting the Saviour's coming? that are in the condition that even the heathen saw the Thessalonians to be in, waiting for the Son of man from heaven, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come? Ask any body of ministers of any Church on earth, how soon do you expect the Lord's coming? Are you as a body rousing up the body of Christ to be ready, not knowing the day nor the hour of his coming? And there is not a single Church on

earth that could answer with truth, we are as a whole stirring up our own people to practical preparedness for the unexpected and speedy coming of the bridegroom and his bride, the Saviour and his redeemed from heaven. "They all slumbered and slept."

Here, then, we have the spiritual interpretation of these symbols; but this prediction marks a point of time, "then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins," and considering it as applicable peculiarly to that point of time that takes the kingdom of heaven and divides it into two nearly equal parts, we may expect, towards the coming two great divisions, not of individuals, but of Churches; that we may expect on the one side, one set of Churches which will be eminently distinguished for having the light of God's Spirit, and on the other side, another set of Churches that shall be dark, without the light of God's Spirit. We are not, brethren, to enter into the judgment seat and condemn our brethren; when we pass opinions it is not giving judgment; but yet we cannot look upon the state of the Christian world and not see this very thing taking place at this moment. The Church of England and the Church of Rome are occupying in the Christian world, at this moment, an awfully important position. We have, blessed be God, in the midst of all our sins a great awakening in the Church of England; she is sending forth her light through the world; she is rousing herself to a greater conviction of her duty. We have our princes, our nobles, and our people; and we have our bishops, and priests, and deacons, and people, more aroused and more awake than ever they have been at any former period. We have the preaching of the Gospel and the Saviour's coming announced more clearly than ever it

has been before; but it is not in our new churches, in our increased ministers, or in our better attended sacrament, or in our extending missions, that we are to rejoice, for this is not the point that is brought before us here, but it is in this solemn question, is all this done under the unction and with the light of God's holy Spirit? There were as many virgins at the one side as at the other; there were as many lamps at the one side as at the other; our great question is this, have we reason to believe that our bishops are more anxious to have spiritual men, that our ministers are more anxious to be holy and spiritual men, that our people in coming better to public worship, and in being more frequent in attendance at the holy communion, and in their attention to their duties, are manifesting that it is in the light and unction of God's Spirit that they are doing so? Otherwise they do not come under the class of those wise virgins spoken of here. On the other hand we are to expect Churches that are expectant of the Lord's coming, but not ready to meet him: and without daring to judge the Church of Rome, but yet looking at her in the light of God's revealed word, can we go anywhere that we do not find her activity? Do we not find her like Ishmael to Isaac face to face with the Church of England, wherever we go through the whole world? We are making converts even amongst the Eastern Churches, and she has been for long doing the same thing. We are sending out our bishops to the colonies, she is sending out her bishops and arch-bishops in the same way. We are stirring ourselves up to greater activity, she is doing the same. We see her even in our own land gathering converts out of our own Church: and what does she make them? Very zealous for ordinances, very great professors of a brighter

holiness and a deeper piety than ourselves: but we do not see the fruits of the Spirit; we do not see her repenting of that awful decree of the Council of Trent, that if any one shall say that justifying faith is nothing but a confidence in the divine mercy pardoning sins for Christ's sake, let him be accursed. We find no repentance in the Church of Rome for all her abominable lies and blasphemy respecting her false miracles, and for that article in the creed of Pope Pius, that if any one will not say it is the true Catholic faith to worship with outward veneration a wooden image he must be damned. We do not find the Church of Rome repenting of her saying, that if any one will not believe all her ecclesiastical traditions he must be damned. We have this awful blot upon the Church of Rome unrepented of, and truly the Spirit of God is not in these things. We have those who go over to the Church of Rome very zealous about worshipping a woman and praying to saints, and whatever they may have there, the Spirit of God is not there. We see in our own land that those who join her communion are not zealous for truth, they are not promoters of Scriptural holiness, and they do not circulate God's word. What do we see upon the Continent? If we look through European Christendom do we find the peace-giving power of the Gospel of Christ? Or do we find, that wherever Romish priests have power, and the Romish Church has power, an instructed people, an enlightened community, and the peace of God giving the peace of man? Or do we find the very head quarters of that fallen and unhappy system kept together, not by the power of the Gospel, but by the power of a foreign bayonet? Brethren, these are signs of the times upon which we should fix our very solemn and very

earnest attention, that we may be instructed in the things that belong to our blessed Saviour's coming, and see whether we are now ready to meet him.

If our time permitted us, but we shall have other opportunities of going over the same subject, we might go through the prophets and show how the last struggles of the last days are between two great powers, the king of the north on the one side and the king of the south on the other. But there is no struggle mentioned here, because the object of the parable was not to represent a struggle, but to represent this one thing upon which our Saviour fixes our thoughts, the possession of the ever blessed Spirit of God in his sealing unction. As a prediction, therefore, Christ warns us here that the Church of Christ, the professing Church of Christ, will be found at the time of his coming divided into two great communities, whose primary and essential differences shall only be this, the want of oil and the possession of oil. People are often stumbled at the Church of England being so like in its forms to the Church of Rome; it is her glory instead of her blot, for this is the truth taught in this very parable. Christ does not make the one unlike the other; it is this, and this only, in which we should desire to differ, that we should keep close to the animating power of God's holy Spirit.

III. And lastly, let us consider here the moral and spiritual teaching. A community consists of a number of individuals, and the character of each individual goes to compose the character of the whole community, and therefore if we look at it in its public or in its individual aspect it teaches us essentially the same lesson that Christ directs our thoughts to, which is, have we the oil of the Spirit's unction. There is a deep teaching with reference to

oil here, "We are made unto God kings and priests." The priest in his first preparation for the priesthood was washed, but in his completed preparation for the priesthood he was annointed: and there is that two-fold application of God's Spirit in the Church; in our entrance into the Church we are baptized, for an admission to the Lord's table we are confirmed. The one symbolizes the washing of the Spirit; the other the anointing of the Spirit. A man is not entitled to the Lord's table by simple baptism, he is confirmed as an admission to that holy communion; and our ever blessed Saviour fixes our thoughts upon this two-fold work of the Spirit when he says, "he dwelleth with you and shall be in you." And St. John tells us the spirit was not yet given because that Jesus was not yet glorified. That there is a gift of the Spirit subsequent to our faith and our acceptance by faith: "in whom, says the apostle, after that ye believed ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." Individually, therefore, the great teaching of this parable is a solemn admonition to us to enquire whether we have the unction of the Spirit of God. We have all had that which is symbolized by the washing of the Spirit of God, for the experience of every one of us teaches us that God is speaking in us by his holy Spirit. The profane man has the voice of God within him warning him of the danger of sin; the careless man has the voice of God within him, occasionally making him solemn, and telling him to flee from the wrath to come. Every man has his measure of the Spirit of God given to him, to enlighten, to instruct, and to guide. Jesus is the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world: but every man has not the oil of God's Spirit within him: this, and this only, is that which seals us as his children unto everlasting

life and blessedness. He who hath anointed us and sealed us is God, who hath also given to us the earnest of the Spirit. This is that witness of the Spirit, the comfort of them that are sanctified by the blood of Christ, as the apostle says in the 10th chap. of Hebrews, "Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us; after that he had said before, this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days saith the Lord, I will put my law into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." That unction of God's Spirit is declared to be like the oil that maketh man's face to shine; it heals our spiritual diseases as well as makes to shine our outward character; and this is that unction, brethren, which indeed it becomes us to ask ourselves whether we have in deed and in truth this mark of God's children or no. We may not by it be able to understand the dark mysteries of scripture perhaps, nor to interpret the difficult symbols of all the obscure prophecies: or by it understood the ancient history of the nations, or the various questions that may be raised respecting theological truths: but he that has the teaching of that Spirit is taught of God to come to Jesus Christ his Saviour and only Redeemer; he is enlightened of God to see Christ at the right hand of God, as truly to see him with the eye of his mind as the dying martyr of old did with the eye of his body. And seeing the Son he is taught of God to believe on him, to commit all his whole being to him, saying, with him who declared, "I know in whom I have believed, that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him unto that day." Surely we must all know whether we have this confidence in Jesus which is indeed the sealing power of God's holy Spirit. Every one of you must know

whether at this moment you are able thus to look up to Christ, able to come to him, feeling the drawing of his Spirit; able to see him, having the light of his Spirit; able to love him, having the love of his Spirit shed abroad in your hearts; able to live with him; having the oil of his Spirit, making your lives to shine by the unction of that blessed Spirit upon you, and having the healing power of his Spirit, taking away gradually the spiritual diseases that defile and disgrace the character of our Christian profession, and making us more and more to progress towards that spiritual health which is indeed the power of God's holy Spirit.

The unction of the Spirit is also referred to here as belonging to a community, and here our Saviour speaks of oil in the vessel and oil in the lamp, and the need of a continual supply of oil from the vessel to the lamp. There is in that a very blessed and a very deep teaching, which will profitably occupy our thoughts this evening; for the means of providing the oil is indeed a most important truth, and very clearly taught us in the figures of the prophetic word. Brethren, let us take these truths home to our hearts, and let us ask ourselves earnestly, solemnly ask ourselves, do we thus feel the power of the grace of the Son of God? Do we thus believe on him? Do we thus receive from him that power which is able not only to make us wise unto salvation, but to do all things through Christ that strengtheneth us? Where is the need of complaining of weakness to him that has the grace of Christ at hand to strengthen him? Where is the need of walking in darkness to him that has the light of Christ's Spirit to shine upon him? Where is the need of living in sin to him that has the life of Christ's Spirit to give him spiritual life?

Where is the need of trembling for want of evidence to him that has the holy Spirit standing by ready to seal him, as Christ has promised; "for if ye, being evil, know how to give good things unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XXI.

THE TEN VIRGINS.

"*They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*"

That must be indeed a great self-deception which could bring the soul into the presence of the Saviour and not know its need of acceptance until it was there. Cain came before the Lord with an offering, and, as far as we can judge of the state of society then, he had nothing to induce him to come but his own inward feelings, and yet Cain came and presented an unaccepted offering before the Lord. Had there been no plain visible manifestation of the divine favour to Abel, Cain might have gone away a self-satisfied and yet unaccepted worshipper. These virgins are represented as going out to meet the bridegroom, and it is not until their going out to meet him that they find they have no oil in their vessels. It seems to us an extraordinary folly that they would venture to go without first asking themselves whether they had oil; and if our blessed Saviour were to come this night it seems to us as if not one of us would venture voluntarily to walk out to meet him except we were quite sure of

having examined ourselves and answered the question, —satisfactorily answered the question, whether we were ready to meet him or no. Brethren, are we coming less really to meet him when we come up to the house of prayer? Or is that less real in which he has said, "in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee?" And we may be sure that the heart that is self-deceived in coming to the house of prayer, without a previous examination as to whether that heart is bringing the unction or oil of God's indwelling spirit, that that same self-deceived heart would go out to meet the bridegroom and go in vain; and that it is indeed in the use of present things that we can best test our fitness for the future things; "he that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." He that makes a bad use of the means of grace on earth would make a bad use of the blessedness of glory in heaven; and we may therefore make a most profitable use of parables such as this, in applying them to our present condition as well as to our future hopes. The Lord speaks here of the foolish virgins that came forth to meet the bridegroom and took no oil, although they took their lamps and their vessels; and of the wise virgins who took not only the lamps with them, but the vessels for containing the oil, and the oil in those vessels.

This morning we considered this parable in its predictive character, and in some degree in its moral and spiritual teaching, but I have deferred until this evening to consider more minutely the scripture notices of these vessels of oil, and the spiritual application of these lamps and vessels which we are enabled by other parts of scripture to apply to the means of grace and so to the hope of

glory. It is indeed a blessed and solemn subject; may all our hearts be now prepared by the grace and power of God's indwelling spirit to receive the oil of his truth and the grace of his love, that if hitherto we have been in any part foolish virgins we may cease to be so, and before the midnight cry is heard, prepare to have the oil in our vessels, remembering that gracious promise, your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

Now, here we have to examine what other parts of scripture say of the lamps, of the vessels, of the oil. We have the lamps and the candlesticks explained to us in the 1st chap. of Revelation where we read that, "the seven candlesticks are seven churches." and if we compare this with the 4th chap. of Zechariah, we have there all the figures that are needed to explain this part of the parable. In the 2nd verse we read that "the angel said unto me, what seest thou, and I said I have looked and behold a candlestick all of gold with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon the top thereof, and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl and the other upon the left side of the bowl." In the 11th verse we read again, "Then answered I and said unto him, what are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick, and upon the left side thereof? I answered again and said unto him what be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered and said knowest thou not what these be? and I said, no my Lord; then said he, these are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." Now, learning from the book of Revelation that the candlestick is the appointed figure of the church, we have here a golden

candlestick setting before us the church of God, and we have two olive trees setting before us the two anointed ones, that pour, through golden pipes, oil, into the receptacle upon the top of that candlestick—oil into the church of God. Now, if we compare this with the 11th chap. of the book of Revelation, we find that that was not merely true of the Jewish dispensation, but that it is equally true of the Christian dispensation, for in a similar symbolic description of the Church of Christ, in the 11th chap. of Revelation, we read, "I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth."

Many persons draw a most unscriptural distinction between the Jewish and the Christian dispensations, but here we can have no mistake because we have the mind of the spirit setting before us in these figures that whatever was taught under the Jewish dispensation repecting the golden candlestick, and the bowl upon it, and the oil within it, the olive trees, and the golden pipe, the same is taught under the Christian dispensation by the very same figures, and that these two olive trees are represented here as being men who bear witness for God, and whose office it is not only to stand before the Lord of the whole earth, but, according to the prophet Zechariah, to pour oil into God's candlestick—his church—his life-giving church upon earth. Now, if we return again to Zechariah, we find him there speaking of these olive trees as those who are standing before the Lord of the whole earth,—the anointed ones. Men were anointed under the old dispensation for three offices,—prophet, priest, and king: but although these three offices were anointed,

but two are said in scripture to stand before the Lord of the whole earth. The king is an anointed one, but he is not said in scripture to stand before God, but the prophet is represented in scripture as standing before the Lord, and so is the priest. We find in the 17th chap. of the 1st book of Kings, that Elijah claims this character for himself as the prophet of God,—that he stands before the Lord of the whole earth, "And Elijah, the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, as the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Here then we have scripture explaining itself that the anointed one who stands before the Lord is a prophet. If we turn to the 10th chap. of Deuteronomy, and the 8th verse, we have the same applied to the priest:—"At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord, to minister into him, and to bless in His name, unto this day." The two olive trees,—God's two witnesses in the world,—are therefore the prophet and the priest,—the anointed ones to stand before the Lord of the whole earth, to minister in his name.

A great deal of mistake has arisen respecting the priesthood in the Christian church, because of the awful corruption of the doctrine by the Church of Rome, and of the similar effort to corrupt the doctrine by the Tractarian party in our own church. It arises from confounding the High-Priest with the priest. There is no typical High-Priest in the Christian church as there was in the Jewish church, because in Jewish days there was no real High-Priest: the Son of God had not then become incarnate; but, since we have had a real High-

Priest of the holiest above, we have had no High-Priest on earth; therefore the Gentile dispensation had needed no High-Priesthood, except that blessed High-Priesthood where He is who has entered into the presence of God for us. And here, again, is the great mistake of confounding the chancel of the church, where the communion table is, with the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple. The Holy of Holies is lifted up to heaven, and there is the perfect Holy of Holies as there is the only true High-Priest. But it does not follow that, because there is no High-priesthood, there is, therefore, no priesthood in the Church of Christ now;—for the Lord has his prophet and the Lord has his priest now—his true priests, who minister unto him and who bless in His name; who stand before the Lord of the whole earth; who are the anointed ones, as we have just seen from the testimony of the gospel and the prophet at the eleventh of Revelation,—"These are the two anointed ones; these are the two olive trees that stand before the Lord of the whole earth." Here, therefore, we have the Scripture warrant for applying the figures of the Jewish dispensation to the Gentile church, with the distinction which I have just made respecting the High-Priesthood; and further, we read in the fourth epistle to the Ephesians, of this character of the Christian church in her unity, in the eleventh and following verses:—"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that

we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the sleight of man and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive: but speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

Leaving the figure of the candlestick, the apostle here comes to the figure of the human frame, in order to illustrate the compactness and the nature of the unity and efficacy of the services which God has appointed in his church on earth. Here we have that by which saints are to be perfected for ministration,—that ministry to which the resurrection of the Saviour has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, who join together the whole body, and compact it in all it's joints, that it may be supplied with that which neither prophet nor teacher could give, of which He is only the channel,—that life-giving unction and life-sustaining power of God's Holy Spirit, by which alone the church can grow. We do not read here of one head on earth, but of one head in heaven; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; for the unity of the body of Christ centres around her a living, glorified head in heaven, and not some wretched, decrepid head on earth. Putting these descriptions together, therefore, we are enabled to see what our blessed Saviour meant when he spoke of the kingdom of heaven being like unto ten virgins, each of whom had her lamp for oil, and her vessels which were to supply that lamp with oil. Those who neglected

the vessels, their lamps had gone out; and those who had brought oil in their vessels, their lamps were burning brightly and they were ready to meet the Lord.

Now, here we are met with the rebuke of that foolish, and worse than foolish, Church of Rome, which makes people think themselves right if built up in what they call church principles; for what did these foolish virgins need? Nothing of office—they were virgins; nothing of preparation for the spirit—they had lamps; nothing but the oil; but, needing that, they needed everything; and when the bridegroom came they were shut out.

Brethren, it is just as foolish to trust in a church because it is a church, or to trust in a ministry because it is a ministry, or to trust in sacraments because they are divinely-appointed ordinances, as it would be to trust in a sheepfold where there are walls and gates, and a shepherd, but no grass to feed the sheep within. But, on the other hand, it is not the mind of the spirit to despise the church, to despise her ordinances, and to reject her ministry, and to cast away that which the head of the church has given us for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Our blessed Saviour, therefore, directs our thoughts to the vessels that are to contain the oil, and to the lamp that is to contain the kindled light—that is to give light in the darkness, and to be the light that is to guide the bride and the bridegroom to their return and rest.

Here we have indeed a most blessed subject for our thoughts, that we may ask ourselves in our dispensation, what are those vessels for oil that the great head of the church has provided for us? There is one thing,—the unity of the body: could a human body retain its exist-

ence if it were a dissevered body? It could not. And the church cannot maintain its corporate existence if it be a distracted and disordered church. We must bear in mind that it is of communities that the scripture speaks here, and not of individuals; it would indeed be a very untrue inference from this parable if we were to suppose that no individual could maintain his life except he were to be found in a corporate body of the church; that is, the terrible error of Romanism, and of those who lean towards Romanism. We must evermore bear in mind that the individual soul that is able to look up to Heaven and Paradise, and to trust in the Saviour's love, and to seek for the Saviour's spirit, if he were on a rock in the ocean—if he were in the midst of a desert, he would obtain everlasting life from serving the Son and believing on him, as truly and as fully as if he were placed in the midst of the greatest privileges which the most blessed state of the Church of Christ could give him on earth;—that is, if God deprived him of outward means, God's blessed spirit can more than supply those means, sending down from heaven into his soul the life-giving power of his own indwelling spirit; so that it is not of individual religion that this parable speaks, but of the corporate character of the Church of Christ, and in this it is indeed true that were a church not a united company, it could not maintain its corporate existence by division and distraction. Here, therefore, we have much need to ask ourselves, are we endeavouring to preserve the unity of the church? are we endeavouring to preserve the discipline of the church? are we standing in God's word? and what is the nature of that unity of which the apostle says, "one body with its head in heaven, with its members on earth,—apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and

saints, compacted together by that which every joint supplieth and thus bound together as one community.

On future occasions I hope to be able to bring this important subject before your thoughts and your consciences too, for indeed we are all far short of even endeavouring to be what the Scripture represents the community of the body of Christ to be. We ought, ourselves, as one congregation, to be more completely a Christian body than we are. We ought to be more fully realizing the power of the Christian unity than we are even endeavouring to be now.

But let us pass on from the unity of the body to the other means which the New Testament, as well as the Old, concurrently declare to be the means of giving God's spirit to the light and the life of His church. These anointed ones pour the golden oil out of themselves through golden pipes into the bowl of the golden candlestick, and so the light of that candlestick is fed.

Brethren, it is an important office to attach to a human being:—that olive tree struck its roots into the earth and grew out of the earth; it was moistened and watered by the rain from heaven; it was fertilized and warmed by the sun of heaven, or it could be no olive tree to bear the oil which it could send into that golden candlestick. And now the minister of God strikes his roots into the earth; he is but an earthen vessel, and he needs the refreshing streams of a heavenly spirit, and the bright shining of the sun of righteousness or he could be no channel of God's oil to God's people in his candlestick on earth. It is not too much to attribute this office to man, for, if we look at the history of the Church of Christ, do we not see that where there is no praying priesthood, there is no praying people as a public worshipping as-

sembly; that where there is no teaching prophet there is no instructed people as concerns public teaching? We may indeed, and do find individuals in retirement, in the darkest spots of this world—souls who are deeply taught of God—where there is neither priest to worship nor prophet to teach; but we do not find this true of any community. Take a darkened priesthood and we have a degraded church: take an ignorant prophet and we have an uninstructed congregation. The Lord has, in his inscrutable wisdom made man in this respect outwardly at least dependant upon his fellow man; and is not this what the apostle declares to Timothy, to belong to his office, as you will read in the last verse of the 4th chap. of the 1st Epistle to Timothy? "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine, continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." And for this cause it was that when the blessed Saviour saw the multitude scattered abroad like sheep having no shepherd, he not only spent a whole night himself in prayer to God, but when he came down from that mount of prayer, he said to his disciples, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." Now, if we thus take the priestly and the prophetic office of the church, let us see in what it could be that without oil "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." It was well said by an eminently useful writer of old, "a dead minister speaking to a dead people the living truths of the living God, is indeed an awful sight." It is not the letter of prayer that can give us the spirit of prayer; it is not the correctness of orders that can give us the living priesthood. We do well to take and to keep to the form of sound words; we have much reason to bless God for that apostolically descended

ministry which we have amongst us, but these in themselves are but dead, and more than dead, they are killing, if they are only in themselves. We have much need to see that our ministers, God's priests amongst us, have themselves the oil which they are to empty out of themselves amongst the people of God; and therefore it was that the apostle feeling this so deeply, continually implores the prayers of his people, continually implores those whom he had to rule and govern, to instruct and teach, and with whom he worshipped, that they would help him in prayer to God that he might be enabled to be a faithful minister of Christ, as he says in the 6th chap. of his Epistle to the Ephesians, in the 18th and 19th verses, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication of the spirit, and watching with all perseverance and supplication for all saints and for me, that utterance may be given unto me that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel." "To pray for me," —that he expects much grace from God upon his own soul, and in his own heart through the prayers of those upon whom he was to pour out the fruits of that spirit, that they also through him might be owned and blessed of God. And if we have to regard God's ministers as his priests for public worship, to stand before the Lord as his anointed ones, we have to regard them also as teachers for instruction. They are pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints;—their business it is to bear witness for God, and to speak as the apostle says, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. They are not men who are to teach out of the thoughts of their own minds, but who are well instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, bringing out of their blessed

treasure, the Bible, and only from the Bible, by the teaching and light of God's spirit, those truths which bear witness to God's Son, and teach us how to be wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Another part of the ministerial office, and a most important part of the office, is declared to be the pastor, the man who is to go from house to house, from family to family, from heart to heart, and to ask, How is it with your souls? Here, brethren, is one of the greatest deficiencies of the Christian church in the present day, a deficiency arising from many causes, and a deficiency concerning which it may not be unsuitable in this place, and at this time, to say a few words more directly applicable to ourselves. The pastoral office is indeed one of the appointed means of pouring the oil of God's spirit into the hearts of God's people. It was of the pastoral, not of the public, teaching alone that the apostle spake to the elders of Ephesus, as you will see in the twentieth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles: there he speaks of himself, and says, in the twentieth verse, "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have sought you publicly and from *house to house*." Now, what have we in our Church of England, at this moment, for the supply of this divinely appointed golden channel for emptying the oil of God's spirit into the hearts of his people? We have the name of pastor, and it is *but* the name. Look at the district connected with this church; we have within it eight thousand souls entrusted to one minister. Where can the pastor be there? As far as the church is concerned, but one pastor is provided here for eight thousand souls. It is indeed true that, by other means, there are three additional ones added to this church, but

it is not by any public provision that any more than one of them is appointed. And yet, even taking the four, what are four men amongst eight thousand people? And if I may venture here to make a reference, in connection with such a subject, to myself, as having the care, the chief care, of souls in this district,—in the providence of God many other things are entrusted to me; I shall not say higher ministry, for there is no higher ministry than to go to the sick-bed and to comfort Christ's afflicted ones, or to go after the wandering sheep and bring back the wandering individuals, as he who is the greatest minister of all did, when he tarried beside the well. But one cannot be attending to every duty, and the pastoral work in this place has become to me, personally, an impossibility now. All that is possible for me in this respect to do, is to do what I can with those fragments of time which other duties leave to me for seeing the people committed to my charge individually as I am able to do. It will always give me great pleasure to be sent for if there be a heart that needs soothing, or a soul that needs counsel: but as to the general care of the district, it would be impossible, even if I had individually nothing else to do; for there is no possibility, even with all we have here, to perform fully the pastoral office, which is one of the chief appointments of Christ for the edifying of the body of Christ. But yet it would be very easy to supply them, if there was a deeper sense of the need and blessing that is attached to the house-going ministry; if each family in this place were to subscribe but two pence in the week, it would give us all that is needed for the pastoral care of souls in this place. But if we had money, that would not bring men; we need to pray the

Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

Brethren, the time is hastening onwards—the midnight hour is coming—the day when the Son of man shall be announced in the trumpet blast from heaven, and that voice shall be heard, "Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." But feebly, indeed, does our church supply that need which shall so plenteously furnish that pastoral golden pipe that is to bring into each household and into each heart the golden oil of God's spirit, that there may be an enlightened, sanctified, holy, healthy church to be a chaste virgin for Christ when he shall come in his glory and his glorified church with him.

But now there are other ordinances entrusted to the ministry and committed to the people, which we also need to dwell upon, if we would rightly understand the instruction and admonition which our blessed Saviour gives us here: "They that were wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." One great means of blessing to our souls, as well as of homage to God, is public worship; that we have in part: we have our Sabbath services, and those services, comparatively at least, well attended; but if we have felt as we ought the unction of God's spirit, we should earnestly crave that every word of prayer, that we use might be indeed living words, meaning what we say and expressing what we feel. We should earnestly pray that we may truly realize in prayer, the unity of one body, pouring out the language of one heart to the one God, the Saviour of us all. If this were indeed the case, we should have a more lively feeling of devotion as we meet together in the house of God. We would not, probably at

least, have the languid response that we now have in the appointed services of our church, where it is but a voice here and there that ventures to allow itself to be heard in response in those words of holiness and prayer to God, when we are joining together in public worship. If we had more vigorously the life of God amongst us, we would not wait from Sabbath to Sabbath for one stated time of prayer; we would not have so few to be found here on Wednesday evenings as now we have, or so few who had time to come on a Friday morning; nor should we find so great a difficulty in assembling a sufficient congregation for daily prayer; for let us remember, that in a darker dispensation than our own, when there was less of the power of God's spirit, there was yet that appointment of daily prayer, the nine o'clock service and the three o'clock service, in which the worshippers went up every day to worship God. It is not the duty of all to do this; indeed it would be contrary to the duty of many to do so; but yet it could not be but that, in a population of eight thousand people, a sufficient number would be found who had leisure from the duties of life to meet together each day in God's house, and pour out to him language animated by the spirit of prayer.

Brethren, remembering that Christ is speaking of the preparedness for the bridegroom's coming, have we not other ordinances which he has provided for us? There is the holy table of the Lord; why is it that it is not better attended?—why is it that it is not fully realized? Is it an appointed means of grace? Has it especial promises given to it? Is it indeed true that the cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ, and that the bread which we break is the com-

munion of the body of Christ? Those words of our catechism contain either a great truth or a great error—"That the inward part or the thing signified, is the body and blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper." And if we were not unbelieving, or at least unperceiving, the great blessedness of that holy ordinance, Christ's people would not be found so languid in their attendance upon it. We read, in the twentieth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, respecting the Lord's Supper, that it was the chief purpose of the disciples, meeting together on the first day of the week. In the seventh verse we read that upon the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread, and Paul preached unto them. It does not say that they came together to hear Paul preach; although he was an eminent apostle and but a stranger amongst them, yet they did not come together on the first day of the week to hear Paul; they came together to break bread. Those disciples realized the blessing of the Lord's Supper, for they felt that to meet Christ was far better than to meet Paul; that to realize the presence of their Saviour at the holy table was so infinitely above the words that even an inspired man could speak to them; they came together on the first day of the week to break bread.

Brethren, if we truly realized that the Lord's table was indeed his table, although that bread is but bread, and no more than bread after it is consecrated, and although that wine is but wine, and no more than wine after consecration, yet that it has the promise of Christ tied to it, that it has the blessing of Christ given to it, that it is the appointed means, or but a golden pipe, it may be, emptying itself, yet that it is an appointed means of pouring th

body and blood of Christ into our souls; if we were awake to our wants, if we were alive to our privileges, if we were hungering and thirsting after divine life, could it be that so small a number would arise from their slumbers in the morning, and be found at the holy table when the bell tolls? And, knowing that the table of the Lord is spread, that the sacrament of Christ's body and blood is there, and yet that Christ's people can answer, "I have put off my coat, how can I put it on?" though it is the Saviour himself that invites them,—though they have only to put themselves to a little bodily inconvenience that they may meet with Jesus, that they may realize his presence, and test the truth of those words, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? and the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

These are but some of the ordinances which Christ has appointed in his church, and yet they are sufficient to illustrate the meaning of this parable, and to tell us what Jesus meant when he said, "The wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." How needful it is to ask ourselves, do we mean for the future to be amongst the wise virgins or amongst the foolish virgins? Are we hereafter to realize the presence of Christ in his own ordinances, realizing them and employing them to our souls' blessing? We have heaven before us in all its eternal blessedness; we have Jesus coming to us in all his heavenly glory. We have the bride, the Lamb's wife, now under preparation in heaven for that blessed hour—that speedily-coming hour—when it shall be said, "Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

One voice of God's providence after another is speaking to us, trumpet-tongued, that we are coming to those times when that midnight cry shall be heard, "Behold the bridegroom cometh." The fig-tree is beginning to put forth its buds, and the approach of summer is beginning to indicate his coming. We have the warning voice, and we have the encouraging voice of God's word and God's spirit.

O, brethren, let not these sounds pass by us unheeded, for they are not unfounded, let not Christ's admonition be forgotten by us, for heaven and earth shall pass away, but His word shall not pass away. And, if it is Christ that says to us, "Watch!" let us watch. Watch! for ye know neither the day nor the hour where in the Son of man cometh. Surely, the least his people can do is to obey that injunction and be found watching; blessed, says Jesus, is that servant whom, his lord when he cometh, shall find so doing: blessed indeed shall those wise virgins be who shall enter in with their Saviour into the wedding feast, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets of the Kingdom of God. Blessed will be the condition of those who, fearless of man, are seeking only the teaching of God's spirit, making use in a prayerful spirit of all the appointed means of grace, and laying hold upon all the revealed hope of glory. Blessed are those servants who thus will be found amongst the wise virgins taking oil in their vessels and their lamps, aroused and awake to meet the bridegroom, and prepared to hear him say:—

"Come ye blessed children of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XXII.

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

ST. MATTHEW, XXV. 24.—"*For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.*"

False views of the divine nature and character lie at the root of all false practice and all mistakes in religion; for, until the heart rightly appreciates what God is, man can never rightly serve God or feel rightly towards him. The parable before us very strikingly teaches us that the unprofitable servant was he who looked upon God as an austere taskmaster, gathering where he had not strewed, and reaping where he had not sown: unaware of the real goodness of the divine character, he was unfit for the blessedness of the divine presence, and his end was this—"Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." We should bear in mind that this awful sentence is not the mere exercise of sovereignty on the part of God, but it is deeply seated in the nature of things. It could not be that he who has untrue views of the divine love could dwell with comfort in that divine pre-

sence, and he who regards God as an austere taskmaster, cannot be fit to serve God in that heaven of love and joy, where there are no harsh taskmasters found, and no unwilling service rendered.

This parable is not to be confounded with a very similar one which we have in the nineteenth chapter of St. Luke. The purpose for which it was given was in some respects different, although in many respects the same. That parable in St. Luke was given to correct the mistake that the kingdom of God should immediately appear: it was given to the multitudes who were surrounding Jesus before he went up to Jerusalem. This one was given on the Mount of Olives, to instruct his eleven disciples, the faithful ones who were then around him, while the unfaithful one was gone to betray him. Here our Lord speaks of those who have got talents committed to them, and who have this reward,—Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. There we find those who have got these talents getting this reward:—because thou hast been faithful over ten things, rule thou over ten cities; and he who had been faithful over five talents ruled over five cities, receiving a proportionate reward. They each teach a similar, and yet not the same truth; but this one gives us that which more especially belongs to the loving disciple; his reward as the care-taker of talents committed to him was this—he shared his Lord's joy: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Now, in the parable of the virgins, we had the character of the true disciples of Christ in the abiding indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. Here we have another view of the disciples of Christ; not men who are waiting for their Lord, but men who are occupied in their

master's business. "The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods." Christ here represents himself as having left this world for a little while to go to a great distance, and indeed he has gone to a great distance: He has ascended far above the heavens that he might fill all things: and being away, he left the sense of absence amongst his disciples: he left his goods unto them, and he himself was absent from them. It is, as a similar parable expresses it, after a long time that the master comes to reckon with his servants. Here there is one feature of the kingdom of heaven with which our Lord begins this parable; for the Son of man, whose home is earth, not heaven, and whose eternal dwelling-place is to be a glorified world, which is at the right hand of God, is in a far country, distant from the place of his human birth, distant from the place of his eternal dwelling, he is gone there; but before he went he called his own servants and delivered to them his goods. He has given to them all that belonged to him on earth, committed to their care the earth and the fulness thereof. Indeed, is not this what our blessed Saviour has done to his church, when he said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned?"

Now, what is Christ representing this man as doing to his servants? It was not making gifts to them, but delivering trusts to them: he delivered to them his goods—they remained the master's goods still. This truth, then, Christ makes prominent in this parable, that what we have are not our own, they belong to the

Son of man. Our mind is not our own—our talents are not our own: we are stewards of the property of another—He whose they are by creation, and He whose still more they are by redemption: they are his goods. How important a lesson is here brought before our thoughts!—how does it remind us of the words of the prophet: "Will a man rob God?" Will a man take that which does not belong to himself, and use it as if it did belong to himself? And here we see the grave sin of self-will, of feeling as if our sin were our own, as if our property were our own, as if our ownselves were our own. "Ye are not your own; ye are brought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are his." This therefore we should feel taught by the parable before us, that this inscription is written on all that is ours—His goods; Christ's property—not ours. Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one: to every man according to his several ability, and straightway took his journey. How mistaken are men when they wish for more than they have got! How forgetful they are that the master is the person who best knows what to entrust to his servants. Men, wishing for a more conspicuous position in the world, for a larger accumulation of property, for a greater opportunity of satisfying themselves, are they not forgetting that upon all these is inscribed the master's mark—His goods? and that upon them all, therefore, is inscribed another truth—man's responsibility? But each one has got according to his several ability. How would this teach us, brethren, contentment with our lot in life, that it is proportionate to our several ability, that he who has got capacity from God to do a great deal, gets trust from God to accomplish a

great deal; and he who has got capacity from God to do but little, gets trust from God proportionate to do that little which he has the capacity to do: to every one according to his several ability.

Now, there is a twofold view given us here of our relation to God in Christ—the one that what we have entrusted to us is given to us according to the wisdom and mind of Christ; the other, that it is entrusted to us to be exercised according to the ability and opportunity of man; that, while we can do nothing of ourselves, yet we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us, and that we cannot truly say that our business exceeds our power, or that our responsibilities are greater than our opportunities: he has given to every one according to his several ability. If we could remember that, in going on our journey in life, how much heavenly comfort it is suited to give us! Can the mother say, if she has several children entrusted to her care, that she has no ability to train those children for Christ and for heaven? Are they not among those talents entrusted to her charge? and amongst the claims that she has upon the fulfilment of that character of Christ that he is made of God, unto her wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption? And can the man that is placed in difficult circumstances of public life, surrounded by ten thousand difficulties, and pressed down by innumerable circumstances,—can he say that he can be pressed beyond his strength, above life? can he say that he is to despair of being able to accomplish anything, remembering who it is that has given him those trusts and responsibilities, who it is that has surrounded him with those circumstances, and who gives to every man according to his several ability? It is

parallel with the declaration of the apostle Paul, respecting the economy of the spirit of grace in the church; to every one of us is given the manifestation of the Spirit of God to profit withal.

The parable proceeds to represent men as occupying themselves with that which was entrusted to them, "then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents." The figure here is drawn from the ordinary business of the world; a man that has capital entrusted to him, goes and applies that capital in the ordinary commerce of life, and obtains by it the lawful gain of ordinary industry so as to gain double the original capital given to him. "He that had five talents made them other five talents; and he that received two talents, he also gained other two." Now when the Lord of the servants came to reckon with each of these, in this parable we find an equal blessing resting upon both, "Well done good and faithful servant thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The man of five talents and the man of two talents, each received the same approval and each enters into the same joy, because the same principle was shown, the same faithfulness was shown, the same love animated both, the same master was served by both, the same blessing therefore awaited them both, that unspeakable blessing was heard by both, the masters approval, "Well done good and faithful servants." What an eternal reward they must have had in hearing those words, looking back upon all the struggles of the past, and upon all the slow efforts and difficulties by which they had gained those five or those two talents. They had here that which was the comfort and the reward of

the whole, when the master came after a long time, they received a master's approval, and they entered into a Saviour's joy, "Well done good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Now here we have our Lord teaching us that that which takes place in the ordinary commerce of life, is the very same principle that obtains in the heavenly enjoyment of life; that just as a man can take money and gain money with it, so can one take of the spiritual gifts of God and obtain others with them, unto him that hath shall more be given, while from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have." Christ says, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." There is no gift of divine grace that is not capable of increase,—our faith may become stronger,—our love more fervent,—our service more enlarged,—ourselves brighter in the divine image,—our knowledge more clear,—our hope more heavenly,—our walk more Christ-like in every respect; all the gifts of God's grace are just as capable of increase as the gifts and bounties of providence, and therefore the apostle says, "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." We are represented here therefore as heavenly traders, using the talents committed to us so as to obtain more of the same kind. "Labour not, says Christ, for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

Here, then, brethren, we have the opportunity of increase and service taught us in this most instructive parable; and how truly is this the description of the Christian life! If we can follow the child of God from

the time when he was united with Christ by baptism, to that hour when, a ripened believer, he is taken, by the closing and second baptism, into the presence of his Saviour, gathered to the spirits of just men made perfect, we may be quite sure that those who are babes in Christ have as truly received the lineaments of the divine nature as the babe in natural things has received the features of human nature, — that there is a spiritual infancy as truly as there is a human infancy, — that there is the power and development of the faculties of the spiritual nature as there is of the physical nature of our humanity; and thus that we have to examine ourselves, as taught by this parable, to see what has been our diligence in the increase of those gifts which Christ has given us by his grace. It is not merely, How do we use our money? how do we use our time? how do we employ ourselves to lay ourselves out for usefulness to others? But what are we gaining to ourselves?, what can we bring to our Lord, acquired to ourselves, when we come to stand before Him for the scrutiny made of our past as the foundation of the blessedness of our future? have we strengthened faith? warmed love? lightened hope? elevated spiritual-mindedness? Christ's image impressed upon us? and Christ's love given unto us? It is not, therefore, a mere hireling view of talents committed to us that are to be employed by us, although it includes that idea of responsibility; but it is something higher, holier, and more heavenly. There is something given to us by Christ which becomes part and parcel of ourselves, and in which we ourselves grow in grace and have something that we can take with us into the Saviour's presence. Can we take anything that is external to us out of this

world when we come to appear before Christ? What can that spirit take with it but what has become part of itself, but what has become part of its very nature, its faith, its hope, its love, its purity? The real lesson taught us here, is so to live in the midst of this world, in the use of our master's goods, as that they will produce in us and confer upon us those blessed fruits of the spirit, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. It does, indeed, imply, that in the use of these we are kept in all our true relations in life. It is in this way that we are able to have the reflected blessings upon ourselves; and that view of our different talents is presented to us in the closing scene of this chapter, which is to occupy our thoughts this evening.

Let us now consider the unprofitable servant. "He gave unto another one; and he that had received one went and dug in the earth and hid his Lord's money." "Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth; lo, there thou hast that is thine." It was not because he had one talent that he did this, but because he had false views of what his master was. He had no desire to confer a benefit upon his master; he had received a talent, and he did not feel any personal interest in it; he said to himself, why should I toil for the benefit of another? Why shall I be giving my labour to acquire more money, when none of that is to come into my own pocket? My Lord gathers where he has not strawed, and reaps where he has not sown; he does not deal fairly or justly with his servants, and therefore I have no idea of labour

for him. I will take the talent and deal honestly with it: I will keep it for him until he comes again. What fault can he find with me if I give him back that which he gave me, if I give it to him unimpaired, if it is whole as he gave it to me,—what fault can he find with me? Here there is the spirit of the rejected servant. And his Lord answered, and said unto him, "Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed; thou oughtest, therefore, to have paid my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury." Here we have the man's sin brought before us; money being capable of interest, if the man would not labour with it and act like a faithful servant, at least he might have laid it out in such use as did not engage his time; and, though Christ does not intend here to represent himself as saying, I reap where I sowed not and gather where I have not strawed, he represented the principle here upon which he could justly find fault with the slothful servant. The Lord answers the servant upon his own showing: suppose I were such a one as thou wish, is that a reason why my money should have been shut up? And, therefore, the servant could not defend himself as having made a right use of his master's money, for he had not occupied and exerted himself in the care of it. So that the answer here was intended to take the argument out of the mouth of that wicked servant, and show that he did not do what was right with his master's money, even if he were not called upon to labour himself in the use of it. The master might have said much more than he did here, but he said sufficient to convict his servant: "Thou oughtest, therefore, to have put my

money to the exchangers, and then at my return I might have received mine own with usury."

Now, how can we apply this to the position of many men before God? Is there anything that so paralyzes our growth in grace as these ungenerous views of Christ? Men who look upon Christ as some hard workmaster, ever watching an opportunity of condemning them, rather than seeking an opportunity of blessing them,—men feeling this, there is no wonder that their hearts cannot melt with his divine love, that their hands cannot open with divinely-opening energy, that their feet are not shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Do we not find it in our own souls? Is it not the fear of Christ, as an unpardoning judge, that paralyzes faith, that deadens love, that blackens hope, and that hinders service? If we go and find some one gloomy in despair, fearing punishment, dreading the life to come, feeling towards Christ as if he were some one with the sword of vengeance in his hands, rather than with the kingly sceptre of bounty and blessing, do we not find there, a servant whose hope is paralyzed, whose heart is closed, whose eye is dim, whose service is suspended?

There is, indeed, a deep truth, and what we may make this morning a blessed truth, to our souls' instruction, out of this wicked and slothful servant. Let us examine our own hearts, and what is it that prevails amongst the Christless world? Why is it that men have the dislike to religion that they have? Just because they regard religion as something that will deprive them of their hearts' joy. Why is it that they are incapable of serving Christ? Just because they look upon him as a hard taskmaster, and will not learn from Him who laid down His life for us, that they may lay

down their lives for their brethren. Do we find that when the conscience is relieved of the load of guilt, when the heart is expanded with the power of love and gladdened with the confidence of trust, do we then find that men will take their talents and hide them in the earth? Rather do they not find themselves constrained to the service of such a master, gladly engaged in doing what he did, and in being unto the world what he was. The great truth, then, taught us in this fearful part of the parable, is, that without we have right views of the person, and character, and judgment of our blessed Saviour, we may be looking at our spots and stains, at our guilt and sins, as if they were something that should make us afraid to come to his presence and to do his service. He is no hard task-master, gathering where he has not strewed, nor reaping where he has not sown. He is one who can look with compassion upon our sinfulness, with pardon upon our guilt, with bounty upon our need, and with grace to supply everything that we want, according to his riches in glory.

Let us learn, brethren, the blessed truth that is here taught us, then, that if we would not be slothful, unprofitable servants, we must have right views of Christ, we must freely trust in his love, gladly occupy ourselves in his service, and without fear look forward to his coming, when he will say to those who do so, "well done good and faithful servant enter into the joy of thy Lord."

And now the judge took the talent from him to give it unto him that had ten talents, "for unto every one that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Here were both the faithful servants entering into the joy of their Lord, but it is the man that had the ten talents that received more, for while Christ exercised his

love in taking his faithful one into the heavenly joy, he exercises his sovereignty in giving to each severally as he did. We do not read in this parable as in that of the householder, that the man who had got five, murmured that he did not get a share of this talent; that is to say, in that Lord's joy came nothing of such envy, nor of such an evil eye. There we have a blessed truth set before our minds that there is an increase of truth and an increase of occupation, even in the heavenly joy, to those who make the largest use of their master's talents here. The word *have* in the Greek language means more than it does in English, it means to hold as well to have. We have the same form of expression in our own language, when we speak of "to have and to hold;" and if we take this idea, it explains an apparent contradiction in our text, "from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath," the parallel parable give us that which he *seemeth* to have, but from him that holdeth not, that retaineth not in his use and possession shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to hold: that he who has trusts committed to him and does not lay hold upon them, it is implied that they may be with him, that they may be with him in his house, though he is not without them, he has them not in this true sense, they are therefore to be taken from him and given to him which hath abundance. Unto him which hath shall more be given, while from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have, and the judgment of the wicked servant was "cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." What is the expression here? the unprofitable servant. Christ does not take the worst case that he might, but he takes the least bad among his

bad ones, that he might more clearly set before men their responsibilities as well as their duties. The man was not condemned for making a positively bad use of the talent, but for a negatively bad use of it, and so he was unprofitable.

Oh, brethren, let us ask ourselves how have we been unprofitable servants? Is our faith this day stronger than it was in times past? Is our love increased? Has our knowledge grown? Are we ourselves as much more like Christ as we are nearer to eternity than we were in times past? Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness. We must bear in mind with regard to these parables that they are not all of them setting before us eternal punishment, that what is here spoken of is the outer darkness. Our Saviour is not speaking of the duration of that darkness: there are indeed passages where he speaks of going into everlasting punishment, but in this one of the talents he is speaking of an outer darkness, how long it may be, or how short it may be is not said here. We find in the close of the prophecy of Isaiah, that there is a millennial exclusion, an exclusion from millennial blessedness, as well as in other passages of scripture that there is a more complete exclusion spoken of—that those who are in death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire, the smoke of the torment of which ascendeth up for ever and ever. As far as concerns therefore the immediate judgment pointed out in these parables, that is, what will be actually said by our Saviour when he comes on earth to sit in judgment on those on earth, we are not taught here how long that exclusion is to continue; for, taking the parable in its predictive character, we cannot tell whether it may be longer than that gnawing worm that is spoken of in the last verse of the prophet Isaiah, where all flesh shall come to worship before the Lord,

but in their moral and spiritual teaching, they come to us with another and far more complete condemnation, —that there is no purgatory; that after death there is no place in which we are again to regain the use of our master's talent. Here, in the moral and spiritual application of the parable, it speaks to each of us to beware of being unprofitable servants. But now what was the great principle upon which these men exerted themselves for their master? That principle may be seen in the way in which it struck this servant that was unprofitable: there seemed to be no personal reward to him for the labour that he was to give; that these men with the talents were labouring not for the hope of personal reward, but for their master's service. But now, what should induce one to labour in that way but love? The heart that had not love could not labour in that earnest way for the service of another without direct reference to himself, but the man who had love was able to do so without thinking of himself or his reward this teaches us the same lesson—"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord;" that indeed the very truth of life is, that if two beings love each other they rejoice in each other; they find the gladness of their joy in the society of each others' united companionship. Here there is indeed another and very blessed lesson taught us in the motive which animated those men who had the talents committed to them; that they laboured because they loved, and they were rewarded with that which love most earnestly seeks for—they entered into their master's joy.

We have an appeal, brethren, not from men, but from the voice of Christ, to exercise ourselves according to our several ability for our blessed master's service. If

there is one important and interesting spot on this world's surface at this moment, it is our sister, neighbouring kingdom, Ireland,—a kingdom which has been for ages under circumstances of necessity ruled as a conquered kingdom, and under the permissive providence of God, darkened for a long time with the gloom of superstition, and with all the fearful errors of Romanism. There is now an outpouring of God's Spirit on that land, which has awakened a deep interest in the hearts of the servants of God; and that country, which so long has been the fountain of Popish evil, sending forth its missionaries to the distant parts of the world, is now becoming more and more an encouraging spot on this world's surface, through which we may hope that much of good will go. Amongst the various agencies for good there, the "Ladies' Hibernian Female Society" occupies a most important place in the great struggle for scriptural education which has been going on for years in that land: the female portion of the education has been greatly watched over by that most scriptural and most benevolent society. It has laboured in friendly connection with the Church Education Society for Ireland; and the chief way in which it disposes of its funds is in giving assistance to scriptural schools already in existence, which assistance is to be especially devoted to female education.

For many years I can bear testimony from my own observation that these schools have been and are indeed watched over with truly scriptural care. It is to instruct the daughters of our sister land in the knowledge of Christ, and he who has said, "suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not," is speaking to us this morning, speaking to us to employ the talents and the

opportunities he has given to us in doing his work, if we hope at last to hear him say "well done good and faithful servants." How different would our feelings be if we could always feel that every appeal that comes to us in the providence of God is an appeal to us speaking by the love and intoned by the presence of Christ, that it is not man that speaks to us, but he who left his church in this world with all her sins to the love of his people, that by our mutual care one for another we may become like the image of him who laid down his life for us that we may learn how to lay down our lives for the brethren.

I feel brethren that indeed it needs no apology for making frequent appeals for assistance in the work of Christ; if it be Christ's work to train the little ones of the flock, if it be Christ's work to put the Bible into their hands and to instruct them in the knowledge of the Gospel, it is Christ's voice that speaks to us and says "take and use the talents which I have entrusted to thee and use them for me, occupy till I come." Employ those talents in love, employ them in earnestness, employ them in simplicity, and as surely as Christ left this parable on record, so surely will he say to those who have done so, "Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

PART XXIII.

THE JUDGMENT.

"St. Matthew xxv., 31, 32, v.—*When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.*"

This description of the judgment of the Son of man does not in strictness belong to the parables, and yet it is so closely connected with the two preceeding ones that the exposition of them would be incomplete without this. It is the closing conversation of our blessed Redeemer as he sat with his chosen apostles on that memorable night on the Mount of Olives, when, probably about sunset, the temple was before him with Ichabod written upon her walls, and Jerusalem, under the awful denunciation, was tottering to her ruin, the Lord Jesus gave to his favoured apostles the solemn declarations which we have here respecting the judgment of the Son of Man, what he should say and what he should do to all nations in that day when he should come again in his glory. Without this statement of our blessed Lord the two preceeding parables would

be incomplete in their instruction to us. The parable of the ten virgins sets before us the need of spirituality of mind. Now there is great danger of false spirituality: Satan can put on the appearance of an angel of light, and can make the glow of very fervent affections arise from the heart of man, apparently religious affections when they are not really so, making men think themselves spiritual when they are not really spiritual, for Satan can corrupt what was at first true spirituality of mind, and so mingle his own errors with the previous work of the Spirit of God as to make those who are indeed in some respects holy, spiritually minded persons, yet so perverted by his craft and malice their state of mind is no longer the pure work of God's Holy Spirit. The awful case of Caiaphas, prophecying he being high priest that year, is an example to us of the same man at the same moment under the inspiration of the Spirit of God and the influence of Satanic feelings. On this account had we nothing in the scriptures but these parables which speak of the unction of the Spirit, we should have very imperfect instruction. The second parable gives us the religion of conscience; it shows the necessity of taking care of the talents entrusted to us by rightly using them, and here again in itself we would have a very imperfect description of christian life, a very imperfect guidance for our footsteps in the wilderness of this world. Men may be very busily engaged in the apparent cultivation of religious duties when they are really uninfluenced by true spiritual, holy feelings, and if there were only this test to which to bring ourselves we might be fatally mistaken. The religion of activity in the cultivation of talents is in itself but a part of the revelation of God respecting his will towards man and his work in man. But when we

come to unite the heavenliness of mind which is indicated by the unction of the Spirit of God, with that active cultivation of the graces of the christian character which we have seen to be indicated by the talents committed to us, and combine these with the subject brought before our thoughts this morning, the application of the one and the other to what we may call the humanities of life, we have then, and only then the perfect christian. A man is not to flatter himself with being what he ought to be before God, because he has certain spiritual feelings, or because he can occasionally have an elevation of mind that enables him to enter, in some degree, into what the apostle states as being raised together and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; or even have that cultivation of his religious feelings which is indicated in the second parable. He must unite these two with feeding the hungry, with clothing the naked, healing the sick, visiting the imprisoned, and then, and then only has he that true religion, that threefold cord which is not quickly broken which we behold in the man Christ Jesus, the complete development of the christian character.

There are only two things essential to the salvation of man; these are the atonement of Christ, and the work of the Spirit; all other means of salvation are but subordinate to these. The death of infants is a very striking example of what is essential to salvation, they have no knowledge and they could not be instructed in the doctrines of the Gospel; they have no developed feelings and they could not know the feelings of charity towards God, or trust in Christ. They are incapable of the exercises of those mental and spiritual faculties which they had even in the yet undeveloped condition of them, and

yet they need to be born again; they need to be renewed in the spirit of their minds. Christ bought them with his blood, and the Spirit sanctifies them by his power, and, in them we see what are the essentials of salvation. But when we come to discuss anything else we are discussing that which is subordinate to these: they may, under certain circumstances, be necessary, and under certain other circumstances be not necessary. If we come and offer a kind of evidence of the truth of the Bible and men reject that evidence from a hardened heart or a careless mind, they exhibit to us souls that are untaught by the Spirit of God, and to reject the Bible will be their condemnation at the last day; and under whatever form divine light comes to any individual soul this is the testimony that men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. To reject light, or knowledge, or grace, is a very different thing from a person being, by the force of circumstances without light or knowledge.

Now, our blessed Saviour, in this declaration of the last judgment, brings before our thoughts not the source but the stream, not the seed but the fruit: he presents to us not the doctrines by which the soul is saved, but the results of those doctrines as manifested in the lives of men. As a tree is known by its fruit, so is the seed of divine grace in the heart known by its fruit in the life; and, as a tree is not a tree because it has fruit, but it bears fruit because it is a good tree: so a Christian is not a Christian because he has the fruits of Christ's Spirit, but he has the fruits of Christ's Spirit because he is a converted soul. But in the rule of judgment, Christ rightly brings before us the results, as evidence of what was the state of the soul itself: he tells

us, that when the Son of Man shall come in his glory, to those on his right hand he can say, I was an hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; but he will say to those on his left hand, I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink. He does not declare that the one were saved because they did these things, or that the others were damned because they did not do these things; but that this is the character of those who were saved, and the character of those who were damned.

Brethren, it is, indeed, an awful subject; and when our blessed Saviour speaks of everlasting punishment, surely it well becomes us to think of the meaning of eternity, of the meaning of woe, and that for ever; and that when those blessed lips speak to us of the life and of the blessedness of that kingdom prepared for his people before the foundation of the world, it well becomes us to consider what are the means by which we may attain to the blessedness of the one and escape the cursedness of the other. Let us pray that this solemn warning may ever be impressed upon us, so that we may indeed never forget that day when the Son of man shall come in his glory; that it may produce in us those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.

We must not suppose that the transactions here referred to are the mere work of a day or an hour. He speaks rather of a period than of a limited or short day. He is not declaring that all this shall take place in one moment, but that at one period, when he comes, there will be this manifestation of judgment in the world; that

when the Son of man shall have come in his glory, he shall do the things that are declared here.

From an attentive examination of scripture, we shall discover that many things are frequently placed in close proximity which are very widely asunder in fulfilment; that they are like the unfathomable lights of night, which, to the eye of the spectator, appear all upon one surface, but which, when we come to examine them more closely, and bring the skill of the astronomer to bear upon the depth of the heavens, we find that those things which appeared very close together are not in point of space near each other, they are only apparently so to the eye of the observer. Even those stars which appear to be single, when brought into the field of telescopic vision, are seen not only to be double, but very far asunder; so the lights of future events are often combined together in scripture in one view, when the chronological fulfilments of them are found to be far distant from each other. Had we only this portion of scripture, we would be ready to suppose that it was all to happen at one moment; but we learn from other portions of scripture that the day of judgment—the day of the Son of man sitting in judgment—is a period, a lengthened duration,—not merely one day, for the evident objects of our Lord's discourses was not predictive but moral; it was intended to arouse the conscience, instruct the heart, and enlighten the mind: but we must look to other parts of scripture for the chronological fulfilment of them, for we read in the scriptures of Christ's sitting on the throne of judgment, exercising upon that throne of judgment, during the whole millenial kingdom, the sceptre of righteousness, that he is

at that time, with the breath of his lips, to slay the wicked, as well as to come down like rain upon the mown grass, and like showers that water the earth, upon his believing people. It is not, therefore, a chronological, but a moral statement, that we are to take from this declaration, when the Son of man shall come in his glory, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and all nations shall be gathered before him. The day of judgment that is spoken of here is the judgment of the Son of man. It is not, in one sense, the divine judgment—it is human judgment; for he who is sitting upon that throne is the Son of man. This is probably that period of which the apostle says, in the fifth chapter of the second Epistle to the Corinthians, we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ to give account of the deeds done in the body. It is probably not the judgment spoken of in the twentieth chapter of Revelation, when the dead, small and great, are to stand before God, and they are to be judged by God. We are not to consider the judgment of the great day as a trial; it is acquittal or condemnation, but no process of trial. In human judicature, there is first the examination of the facts of the case respecting the accused, and when that examination has taken place, we have then the judgment passed by the judge. But we are very apt to confound these two things when we think of Christ's day of judgment; that it is not to be a day of scrutiny,—that is, we are not to be brought to a long process of trial,—but men are to be called up to receive sentence, to receive either the sentence of acquittal or the sentence of condemnation. Christ does not produce here, in this statement, witnesses or accusers on one side or excusers on the other; but simply he represents to us here the pass-

ing of sentence. He does, indeed. declare the character of those whom he thus adjudicates, but he does not allow pleading with them; we have no examination of witnesses, nothing approaching to the scrutiny of the human trial; and if we bear this in mind, respecting the purpose of human judgment, it will clear our difficulties respecting the apparent impossibility of time to enter into the scrutiny of the whole life of each man: for Christ is to have all nations before him, and is to sit there as a judge; and that, one after another, every human being shall receive his award from the Son of man. And when he shall have accomplished his work, and the purpose of redemption shall be accomplished, Christ will then present to the Father a redeemed, purified, glorified world; and we believe he will also present, at the same day, an accursed, unrepentant, and finally condemned world. There are those whose names are written in the Book of Life that shall enter into the fulness of everlasting joy and the fulness of eternal glory: and there are the dead, small and great, who are to be delivered up from the sea and from the earth; the bodies yielded up and the soul yielded, and they are to be cast into the lake of fire, and the torments the smoke of which ascendeth up for ever and ever.

But the judgment spoken of here is the judgment of the Son of man,—the Son of man in glory. Now in the 11th chap. of the Prophet Isaiah, so entirely is this a human judgment, that it is declared to be performed by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit acting upon the human nature of Christ. It is said in the 2nd verse, "the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the

Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." We do not gather from this chapter the idea of a momentary judgment, but of that exercise of rule, which is the proper meaning of the word judgment, and yet we do gather from it that deep truth that even the glorified humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ needs to have the indwelling fulness of the Holy Spirit to enable him to exercise judgment; that the judgment of the Son of man is of that man in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" indeed, when we come to think of what it is to be a judge of the whole world, it could not be otherwise. It is truly wonderful that men should be ready to pass judgment on each other, for if we come in the earnestness of an awakened conscience, and in the enlightenment of an instructed mind, and endeavour to pass a judgment upon ourselves at any one given time, and if we were to note down that judgment and then come and examine ourselves at some future time, when the fervour of impassioned feeling has past away, and when the clouds of agitated scenes have passed away from off our mental horizon, and we are able to look back with calmness upon what we then were and what we then said and did, how do we find that we were incapable at the moment of passing a true judgment upon ourselves, and if any one of us were now compelled to give a decision respecting our own character in the sight of God, could we pretend to give an accurate decision respecting what

God or Christ would say to us at the last day? Could we be able to make a true estimate of all our circumstances, of all the aggravations of our sins, or of all the pollutions that might be felt of all that is human that mingles with our religious feelings and actions, and all that is of divine grace in them, could we weed, and sift, and separate the parts from the fuel and give a real decision of our own individual state before God? Surely, brethren, our hearts must tell us that we could not do so. We might indeed, if we were believers in Christ, be able to say that we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we have the witness of God's spirit within our own spirits, testifying that we are the children of God; and not one of us could, or at least ought to venture to give a decision respecting what may be the final decision made by Christ, the great and only true judge of what we are, or what we have been, or what we shall be at that time. And if we find this so with respect to ourselves how much more difficult is it with respect to our neighbour. The apostle warns us "judge nothing before the time until the Lord come who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man have praise of God?" And if we should find it so very difficult to pass a true decision upon ourselves as to our whole life or upon our neighbour as to his whole life, yes, I may say upon any one action of our own lives considered in all its circumstances as it is in fulness viewed by God, how truly beyond human power for the Son of man to sit upon the throne of God, and to look upon every human being and at all the generations of men as they pass in review before him, and with one glance say to each one, "Go thou

to the right hand, go thou to the left hand," "I was an hungered and thou gavest me meat;" "I was an hungered and thou gavest me no meat," "Come ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," or "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Brethren, who is this Son of man that will thus sit upon the throne of glory?—and who is this human being that can thus search into the thoughts and intents of every human heart and every human soul, and remember the wants of every human life from his birth to his death? Can it be such a one as the Unitarian would represent him to be? Can he be such a one as can only be the first and chief of prophets? Can he be the only man of whom it is indeed true "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." Surely we have here, in this one statement of our blessed Saviour,—we have here, in the simplest teaching and in the fullest testimony, that blessed and glorious truth, that this Son of man who is to sit upon the throne of his glory, must be the incarnation of Deity, or he could not search the hearts, and know the thoughts, and remember the lives, and give the award of divine judgment to every human being —that same and only Being who could stand in the midst of the suffering, and the sinful, and the needy, and say to every son of Adam, "Cast thy burden upon me, bring thy grief to me, bring thy sins to me, bring thy weariness to me: come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It is He, and only He that can say, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels

with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats."

Now, having presented himself as the judge, he declares himself to be the king, — as if to suggest the thought to us that it is not merely an hour of judgment but a season of rule. "Then shall the king say unto them at his right hand." It is Jesus Christ upon the throne of David—Jesus Christ in his millenial kingdom; and now he gathers before him all nations because he has that most instructive title "Son of man." We are very apt, in our christian feelings, to forget that Christ is not the Son of the Church merely, although he is that, for we find him represented in the 12th chap. of Revelation as being the man-child that was born of that mystic woman that was clothed with the sun and the moon and had a crown of twelve stars upon her head. While he is indeed Son of the Church he is Son of man—all human nature is brother to Christ; of the bad as of the good it is true that the Lord Jesus is bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. It was not the nature of his elect people only but it was the nature of humanity that Christ took upon him, so that indeed it is true of the whole world that they are Christ's brothers: in human flesh the most pious is no nearer to Christ than is the most ungodly, because he is the Son of Adam and so are they, they are Sons of man and he is Son of man, and therefore Christ suggests the thought to us here of the nearness of his relation to all those who are to stand before his judgment seat. And so we find the same thought in the 5th chap. of John, where he tells, "In that God hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man," and

so in the 15th chap., 1st. Corinthians we read that "As in Adam all die, so in Jesus shall all be made alive."

Oh, how great the opportunity of blessedness that is presented to all mankind; that every human being can look up to Heaven and, without any reference to his own individual state, whether of holiness or unholiness, can point to heaven and say "there my brother dwells," there he, who is at the right hand of God, unto whom angels and archangels do service and homage, is my brother in the brotherhood of humanity because he is the Son of man and because of that brotherhood all nations are gathered together before him. We must bear this in mind that we may rightly understand the decision which he passes here.

Let us now consider the standard of judgment which he makes. He looks at humanity, he looks at each individual human being, and he sees what that individual being did, and from what he did he decides what he was, and from what he was he declares what he shall be for ever.

The only way in which we can account for this and the full account of it is this, that that which is external is the fruit of that which is internal and that every effect is the declaration of some cause; that if we see good fruit we at once pronounce that a good tree is there: and here Christ comes and considers the fruits of those who stand before him; they had fed the hungry, and they had clothed the naked; they had visited the sick, and, in doing this to human beings, they did it to those who were Christ's brothers and Christ takes it as done to himself.

If we believe the total fall of man we must believe that every good thing—every thing that is really good is the fruit of him who alone good, every good gift and every

perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. And we may be assured that where the Spirit of God is dwelling in holy unction—where the sense of responsibility is felt in all our talents, that under the combined power of these two principles and feelings will be produced the result that is here described. Without speculating how far heathens and those who have never heard of Christ may come under the approving sentence that is given here, we may draw a very important and moral instruction for ourselves and of our own responsibilities and position before Christ that if we have the Spirit of Christ within us—if we have the sense of responsibility and the feeling of love teaching us how to exercise our talents, it will assuredly produce those fruits that are here, and if we do not, we are not Christ's people. If we can see the hungry and not care to feed them, and the naked and not care to clothe them, and forget the brotherhood of our common humanity, we have not imbibed the Spirit of him who has left an example to follow his steps, showing us that as he laid down his life for us we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Now we have here the blessed represented as saying "When saw we thee an hungered and fed thee? or thirsty and gave thee drink? or when saw we thee sick and in prison and came unto thee?" They did not know the greatness of the act which they were doing and did not know the result,—the seed of which that action was the result. It was true of many of them as it was true of Cyrus of old, "I have girded thee though thou hast not known me." It is indeed a blessed thought to think that many a human being is obeying the promptings of what he considers to be his own feelings when

they are indeed the work of the Spirit of God, that which he thinks he is apparently of himself, and yet he is indeed influenced by the power of divine love, and thus that which is human is made divine. And so Christ recognises it here as done unto him because it was done unto one of his brethren. On the other hand, those who had neglected to feed the hungry, and the sick, and the imprisoned, were not aware of the greatness of the condemnation they would bring upon themselves, and they had not the vital union with Christ, or they would have the mind of Christ producing the life and imitation of the example of Christ in all their conduct and conversation—inasmuch as ye have not done it unto the least of these, ye did it not unto me.

And now let us observe both the condemnation and the blessedness that are here awarded. The one shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. By comparing this sentence with Christ's declaration in the 16th chap, of St. Luke, about the fire that consumed the tongue of Dives in Hades, we have reason to doubt whether he means a material fire or not: it is the fire of endless anguish,—it is the bitterness of everlasting woe,—the blackness of eternal darkness,—the remorse of a gnawing conscience,—the biting of a worm at the heart, that never dies. It is not true that men need some bodily suffering in order to make them feel the depths of human misery, or why is it that a burdened heart produces the suicidal hand, if it be not that men hope by the infliction of punishment of body to escape the deeper anguish of mind. Indeed we need not materialize those figurative descriptions that are given in scripture respecting everlasting misery to make them a solemn admonition and warning to human

responsible beings on earth, for what would be the punishment of beings left for eternity to unsatisfied desires, to unholy thoughts, to unbridled passions, to ungoverned feelings, to be left forever to the unsatisfiedness of malicious hatred, and to the gnawings of unsatisfied jealousy, to the disappointment of dissatisfied ambition, to the thirst of desire that can never be satisfied, to have capacities for enjoyment to be forever disappointed. this is the true idea of eternal punishment which Christ gives us here, and this is the fire which we have reason to believe will constitute the anguish of everlasting woe. It is a fire such as can give anguish to spirits, for it is prepared for the devil and his angels, for the devil so far as we know, is not being with a body The fire described here is that awful fire of bitterness of anguish, of wretchedness of misery, even of human beings left to their own choice: for as they have voluntarily sought pleasures away from God; as they have voluntarily through life found their choice elsewhere, and have kept themselves in willing separation from him; as their hearts have not turned to him in time, they are not allowed to turn to him in eternity, these shall go away into everlasting punishment, and it shall be forever said of them let them alone, "he that is unjust let him be unjust still, he that is filthy let him be filthy still," he that has chosen separation from God, and from Christ, and Heaven, let him have his choice, let him be forever separate from him,—"depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Oh, brethren, is it not indeed a word that ought to sink deeply into the thoughts and hearts and consciences of us all? are we surrounded by every opportunity that can test our characters, that can exercise our graces,

and shall we be careless and thoughtless about a warning such as is given us here by the lips,—not of the ascetic baptist but of the sympathizing Saviour, from the lips of him who was incarnate goodness and the warning of him who so loved man as to die that he might rescue him from everlasting perdition, that he might deliver him from the bondage of his own corruption and bring him into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

On the other hand, let us look at the judgment of blessedness that is given here, "Come ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." They obtain it as an inheri tance; born to it by the power and Spirit of God, they enter upon it as that which was purchased for them by Christ and prepared for them from before the foundation of the world, because God has saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. And there we shall have—what? the joy of our Lord, the blessedness of everlasting companionship with him whom we are made to resemble by the power of his Spirit, whom we have been taught to imitate in the self-denial of his life; that, as his footsteps were evermore amongst the needy, the hungry, the erring, the sick, the imprisoned, every form of human sorrow and every form of human suffering, going about doing good, so they that follow in his blessed footsteps, who walk in his holiness, and life, and love, shall then stand before him and hear him say to them, "Come ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Let us see this everlasting blessedness before us; let

us group together these three sources of instruction which our Lord gave to his disciples; let us take care that we have our loins girt, our lights burning, our lamps full of the oil of the indwelling Spirit—that we have our talents exercised, our graces cultivated, our gifts employed in the service of him who has loved us and who teaches his people to love him, and have our lives adorned with those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God: may we indeed be enabled to do so: may we indeed be enabled to be so to the praise and glory of redeeming love.

THE END.

PRINTED BY E. HOWELL, 6, CHURCH STREET, LIVERPOOL.

LEIGHTON
SON &
HODGE
SHOE LANE
LONDON